

## A Review of the Relationship between Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Performance

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### ABSTRACT

Parental involvement in the education of their children is a key function of child total functioning as well as their academic success. This paper review the research literature on the relationship among parenting practices such as parenting style, parents' expectations, parental home and school involvement activities and students' academic performance with the focus on elementary and middle school level. To conduct a comprehensive review on above relationship, researchers have used JSTOR data base and Google Scholar. The reviews of empirical researches indicate that different constructs of parental involvement play an important role in various ways. Several studies however indicate a decline in parental involvement during the middle or above school levels. Furthermore, the review indicates that authoritative parenting style is positively associated academic performance across all school level, although this finding is not consistent across ethnicity, culture and socioeconomic status. Parental home based and school based involvements have also been positively related to academic performance with some inconsistency. One the other hand parental expectations for their child educational attainment have the strongest impact on academic performance compared with other types of parental involvement constructs such as participation in school events, parent-child communication, and help in homework.

**Keywords:** *Parental Involvement, Parenting Style, Parents' Expectations, Parental Home Involvement, School Involvement, Academic Performance*

Parental involvement in education of their children is a key function of child total functioning as well as their academic success. Parental involvement practices at home or at school have been found to influence children's academic performance (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Hill & Craft, 2003). Parents play a dynamic role to enhance their children's academic outcomes. They provide financial support, emotional support, motivational support and facilitate the sources (e.g., Books,

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Received: April 6, 2017; Revision Received: May 2, 2017; Accepted: May 15, 2017

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Newspaper, and Educational toys etc.) to ensure their children's better academic performance. Despite the importance of parental involvement in students' education, the operational term of parental involvement has not been appeared consistently in different research studies.

Parental involvement can be defined as any interaction between parents and children at home or with the school to ensure that the children's academic performance is going in a positive way. Feurstein (2000) defined parental involvement as activity encompassing a wide range of behaviors discussing school activities with children to attending parent-teacher conference. Moreover, Holloway et al. (2008) defined parent involvement as the initiation of home based behaviors like monitoring homework as well as school based activities such as attending school events and communication with teachers. In a more constructive way, Ralph McNeal Jr. (2001) listed four elements of parental involvement. One of the most important element of this model was parent child discussion. Other elements of Ralph McNeal Jr. model were parents' involvement in Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), direct engagement in school activities and monitoring children's progress. Furthermore parental involvement has been constructed in various research studies as representing different parental practices and behaviours such as parent child discussion (e.g., Christenson et al., 1992), parental expectation for their children academic achievement (e.g., Hall et al., 1997; Syb et al., 2008; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009), parents' participation in school activities (e.g., Barnard, 2004; Stevenson & Baker, 1987), and different parenting styles (e.g., Dornbush et al., 1987; Steinberg et al. 1992).

This inconsistent construct of parental involvement makes it difficult to arrive at any general conclusion across studies. On the other hand research studies also show inconsistent findings. Some research studies revealed a positive relationship between parental involvement and students' achievement (Barnard, 2004; Christenson et al., 1992; Singh et al., 1995) and others reported no measurable to negative effect of parental involvement on academic achievement (Keith et al., 1986; Tokac & Kacayoruk, 2012). Keeping in mind this contradictory constructs and outcomes of parental involvement, in this paper an attempt has been made to synthesize the research literature on the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement of students with focus on elementary and middle level. In addition, which parental involvement construct is more effectively associated with students' academic performance have also been emphasized in this paper.

### **REVIEW PROCESS**

To conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic performance, researchers have used JSTOR data base and Google Scholars. The search was not limited to a particular date range. The following terms were used as keywords to reflect parental involvement in education: Parental involvement, Parental home based involvement, parent school partnership, parent participation in school activities, parenting styles, parent child discussion and parental expectation or aspiration. On the other hand

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academic performance included Grades, GPA (Grade Point Average), Math achievement test, Reading achievement test, English achievement test, and Science achievement test.

### **Parenting style and Academic performance**

One of the most important construct in the development of students' social and academic achievement has been termed as parenting style. Parenting style is defined as a complex set of behaviors, attitude and emotional climate in which parents raise their children (Shut et al., 2011; Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Baumrind (1978) identified three primary parenting typologies as authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. In addition, Maccoby and Martin (1983) added one more dimension named indulgent. After factor analysis of data on these basic typologies Baumrind (1991) characterized parenting style in two dimensions: demandingness and responsiveness. Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive in nature. They show affection with their child and support their exploration and pursuit of interests (Baumrind, 1978; Dornbush et al., 1987; Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Authoritarian parents are demanding but not responsive. They show a low level of interest, lower affiliation and not interested in open communication with their child (Baumrind, 1978; Dornbush et al., 1987; Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Permissive parents are responsive but not demanding and on the other hand indulgent parents are neither demanding nor responsive (Dornbush et al., 1987; Maccoby and Martin, 1983). In this section, an overview of the relevant research studies on parenting style and its impact on student outcomes have been presented in brief.

A majority of research studies have concluded a positive relationship between authoritative parenting style and students' academic achievement (e.g., eg. Dornbush et al., 1987; Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1991), on the other hand authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are negatively related to academic outcome (Baumrind,1978; Dornbush et al.,1987; Maccoby,2000). In a very earlier study, Baumrind (1967) found that preschool children of authoritative parents were more active, prosocial and achievement oriented but preschool children of permissive parents show low self reliance and under competence. Baumrind (1991) again examined this relationship during adolescence and concluded that school outcomes were positively associated with authoritative parenting style as found in earlier preschool students. In another study, Dornbush et al. (1987) developed and tested a reformation of Baumrind's (1978) typology of parenting styles. They concluded that authoritarian and permissive parenting style was negatively associated with both male and female adolescents. Parental affection was also found to be one of the strongest predictors of students' school achievement, for example in a study Deslands et al. (1998) found that parental democratic support is a strong predictor of school achievement for both males and females. Jaynes(2007) meta analytical study also approved this strong positive association between parenting style ( defined as supportive, helpful and maintaining an adequate level of discipline ) and academic performance for secondary school students.

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In another study, Steinberg et al. (1992) found that authoritative parenting tends to a better school performance (GPA) and school engagement of adolescents, further they concluded that these parents also influence their children's through their direct involvement in school activities such as attending parent teacher meetings, helping in homework, and by setting and maintaining high performance standards. In the same vein, Nyarko (2011) found that both mother's and father's authoritativeness was positively related to the academic achievement of secondary school students. In another study, Paulson (1994) explored the influence of parenting style (demandingness and responsiveness) on the achievement of early adolescents. Both maternal and paternal demandingness and responsiveness predicted the achievement positively. Deslandes et al. (1997) conducted a study with two instruments developed by Steinberg et al. (1992) and Epstein et al. (1993). They concluded that adolescents who perceive their parents as being firm, warmth, and democratic in nature, performed better at secondary school than their peers. This result also conforms the association reported by other researchers (e.g., Dornbush et al., 1987; Kim, 2002). In a study, Marchant (2001) reported that parenting styles (demandingness and responsiveness), parental involvement (values and participation in school functioning), and teaching styles (demandingness and responsiveness) factors significantly predicted their children's school achievement. These findings also confirm the association between supportive environment and academic achievement at early level of adolescence.

Adaptation of academic strategies also is affected by parenting styles. For example, investigation of Aunoka et al. (2000) shows that adolescents from authoritative families applied most adaptive achievement strategies on the other hand adolescents from neglected families applied maladaptive and task avoidant strategies. Further Aunoka et al. (2000) concluded that these strategies were significantly associated with academic performance. Parenting styles were not only related with achievement but also moderated the parenting practices. The relationship between parental involvement practices (eg. monitoring and helping in homework) and adolescents' school achievement have been found better for authoritative parents (Paulson et al., 1998; Steinberg et al. 1992).

### **School-based Parental Involvement and Academic Performance**

Parents school based involvement refers to parents' participation in school activity such as Parent Teacher Organisation (PTOs), volunteer work, visit to classroom and interaction with class teachers. A substantial amount of research studies have shown that parents' involvement in school is associated with children's academic performance in various ways. Parents' school involvement positively affects school environment and classroom learning (Pena, 2000). In addition, parental school involvement not only enhances the teacher efficiency but establishes a good school community relationship also (Henderson, 1987; Pena, 2000). Within an elementary school context, parents are more likely to visit the classroom and make interaction with class teachers. Such visits and interactions increase parents' knowledge about the curriculum, enhance



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mutual understanding and increase the effectiveness of parental involvement at home (Comor, 1995; Epstein, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

In a study, Deutcher and Ibe (2000) found a positive relationship between parents' volunteering at school and motivational level of students. They also concluded that students whose parents regularly kept contact with teacher were more motivated to search extra information about a topic not only in school but outside of school also. Miedel and Reynolds (1999) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the association between parent involvement in intervention and children's later school competence. Results of this study indicate that number of activities in which parents participated in preschool were significantly related to academic achievement and lower rate of grade retention at 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Using data from Chicago longitudinal study, Barnard (2004) reported that parental school involvement activities such as communication with the school, help in class activities and participation in school activities were significantly associated with lower rates of high school dropout, greater likelihood of completing high school and achieving a high grade. Further, this study revealed that parent involvement in elementary school provides long lasting benefits to children throughout high school.

An important trend has been found by the researchers that the parents of early school aged children are likely to be more involved in school activity rather than the parents of older children (Epstein and Dauber, 1991; Stevenson and Baker, 1987). Parents' positive attitude towards teachers, school and child education at elementary level also tend to enhance academic performance and such parents make contact with teachers when students have academic or behavior problems (Topor, 2010). In a study, Shumow et al. (2004) found that the level of parents' education positively associated with parents' involvement in high school. Increase in parents' education level gradually tends to increase parents' involvement in school (also found in Stevenson and Baker, 1987). Further Shumow et al. (2004) concluded that parents' involvement in school was positively related to how skilled students feel during class, their grade attainment and long term academic expectations.

In a study McNeal Jr. (2014) found that parental involvement in PTOs (Parent Teacher Organizations) meeting is strongly associated with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students' science achievement but it has weak to non-significant relationship with absenteeism, homework and truancy. Using data from the National Longitudinal study of Adolescent Health, Mo and Singh (2008) concluded that parental involvement at middle school had a significant effect on students' engagement at school. Students whose parents stay connected with the school are likely to have higher school engagement and better performance. The level of parental involvement and its impact on students' academic achievement has not been found in the same way for elementary schools to upper school levels. Some researchers have reported that the strength of the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement tend to decline from elementary level to upper school level (Singh et al, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001).

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In a meta analytical study at middle schools, Hill and Tyson (2009) found that parent's school based involvement activities such as volunteering at school and attending school events were moderately associated with achievement, whereas Fan (2001) reported, communication with school teachers have a negative relationship with students' academic achievement. In the same way, Tan and Goldberg (2009) reported that parental direct involvement at school (e.g., Attending PTA, helping in the classroom, contact with class teachers, and attending school functions) were positively associated with early adolescents' school enjoyment but had a negative association with overall grades. Further, they indicated that negative association was held only for those students whose parents had a belief that their children did not need help in school. In a study, Tokac and Kacayoruk (2012) found that parents attending school events have a negative effect on middle school students' math achievement. The reason behind this adverse effect they suggested that the parents' collaboration might make the students feel pressure and this pressure affects the students' achievement. Furthermore, McNeal Jr (2001) addressed the influence of parental involvement at secondary school and concluded that PTO involvement and monitoring were positively associated with behavioral outcome (reduced likelihood of truancy and dropping out) while inversely related to cognitive outcomes such as lower science achievement.

### **Parental Expectation/Aspiration and Academic Performance**

Parental expectation and aspiration have been used interchangeably in most of the research studies. Taken together, expectation and aspiration are those belief or judgment that parents have about their children's future academic performance which could be reflected in high grades, high level of schooling attained or college attendance (Shute, 2011; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Glick & white, 2004). Parental expectation or aspiration have appeared as a variable in many parental involvement studies and generally have been found to play important role in children's academic performance. For example, parental expectation as one of the most important predictor of academic achievement has been found in various meta analytical studies (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeyens, 2007; Wilder, 2014).

Further, these meta analytical studies concluded that parental involvement appeared to have a more significant impact at elementary school level than later school level. When parents keep high expectation for their children then they are more likely to provide resources such as books and other educational materials, help in home work and engage in cognitive enrichment activities such as a trip to the zoo, library etc. (Alexander & Entwistle, 1996). Similarly, Sanders and Sheldon (2009) found that students, whose parents showed high educational expectation to their children, discussed with their children about school and future plans and monitored their homework, had a tendency to get a higher grade in English and reading achievement tests. In general, students whose parents hold high expectation from them, perform better in school and persist longer in school than children whose parents hold relatively low expectation (Davis-Kean, 2005; Pearce, 2006). Furthermore, Eccles et al. (1982) assessed the parents' expectation

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on middle age children's achievement self-concept and belief. They found that parental expectation indirectly affects students achievement by parents' influence on their child's abilities and capabilities, which in turn enhance academic competency belief and sense of efficacy.

In a study of 9-16 years old children, Benner and Mistry (2007) found that parental expectation was associated with students' perception of academic skill and ability to learn a new concept in math reading achievement, which in turn related to children's achievement. Moreover, Halle et al. (1997) and Syb et al. (2005) concluded that parents who show higher expectation and place a higher value on their child's educational attainment tend to be more engaged in achievement related activities such as help in reading, sending them to the extracurricular lesson and monitor their educational progress. In a longitudinal study, using data from Chicago longitudinal study Gill and Reynolds (1999) found that children who reported that their parents expected them to do well in middle school, scored significantly higher in reading and math achievement. In another longitudinal study of 6-13 years aged children conducted by Putschick et al. (2009), was demonstrated the long-lasting effect of parental expectation on children's expectation. They concluded that parental educational expectations influenced their children's academic performance five years later via mediating effect of children's expectations, even controlling the children's baseline academic achievement.

### **Home based Parental Involvement and Academic Performance**

Home based involvement includes strategies like communication between parents and children, creating a learning environment at home, monitoring and helping in homework. In a study on secondary school students, Zakaria (2013) found that interaction and communication, parenting practices, leisure, openness, and acceptance were the predictive factors of parental involvement and had a positive relationship with students' achievement. Students may perceive their homework activities as less difficult and more enjoyable when parents are involved. For example, Leon & Richards (1989) concluded that when parents assist their children in homework then they student enjoy doing homework. Using self-determination theory as a theoretical framework for investigating the role of parents in the quality of motivation that students adopt toward homework, Katz et al. (2011) concluded that parents' behavior such as competence, beliefs and positive attitude towards the task of homework, support the children's psychological needs and these needs positively related to children's autonomous motivation for doing homework. Parents' positive attitude toward their role raised academic performance also. For example, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) found that parents' positive attitude toward their own role in their child's education, influenced their involvement which was reflected as child's wellbeing and good academic performance. Similarly, Cooper et al. (1998) found that parents' attitudes toward homework were positively associated with students' higher grades in elementary school. In another study Hill and Craft (2003) found that parent's engagement in child's home activities was a significant predictor of math achievement score among elementary school students.

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In a study on middle school students, Shui-Chu and Willms (2009) reported that parents from a different level of family background provided an almost similar level of home supervision. They also concluded that parents' discussion with children about school related activities at home had the stronger relationship with academic achievement rather than parents' participation at school. In a study, Regnar (2009) found that parents academic monitoring positively predicted mastery goal of middle school students. Clark (1993) concluded that if parents monitor their children's behavior after school then children were more likely to achieve high grades in school. In the same way, Keith et al. (1993) conducted a study on middle school students and found a positive relationship between parental involvement in homework checking and students' academic performance. They Further concluded this achievement tend to high when parents monitor their children's activities such as television watching.

A study drawn upon ecological perspective, Tam and Chan (2009) concluded that parents' provision of guidelines and structure were positively related to children's efficacy beliefs in academic performance as well as self-regulated learning among elementary school students. Research studies show that the benefit of parent's involvement varies according to students' school level (Regner, 2009; Seginer, 2006; & Jeynes, 2007). Despite these positive impact of parents' involvement in home based activities, some researchers have highlighted that parental home based involvement create null to negative outcomes also. For example in a study Pezdek et al. (2002) found, parent involvement in homework activity is unrelated to children academic performance. Similarly, Fan and Chen (2001) reported that parental involvement in the home as measured by parental supervision is not significantly associated with academic achievement across middle school. This inverse pattern also emerged in Jeyens (2005) meta-analysis, which reported no relationship between parents' involvement in home activities and academic achievement among elementary school students.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research studies on parenting practices as related to students' academic achievement have focused on several important parenting constructs such as parental involvement in home activities, participation in school events, monitoring and communication with children, parenting style and educational expectations. In terms of these parenting practices, the research studies suggest that when parents are actively involved in their children's educational activities, show affection to their children, participate in school events, democratic and responsive in nature, and keep positive educational expectation then students' academic performance becomes higher. Although the conclusion that parental involvement has a positive impact on students' academic performance is an intuitively appealing concern for educationist but there is still a great deal of inconsistency and contradiction in the empirical research literature. Moreover, the multifaceted construct of parental involvement and the different measurements for academic performance contributed to the inconsistency and contradiction make it difficult to come to general conclusion. Apart from this, the psychological variables of students like students' will to learn,

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their ability, inclination towards academics perseverance and other relevant variables have not been considered in the studies reviewed. This may also be the cause of inconsistent and contradictory findings in the studies mentioned in the review.

In term of parenting style, the research studies indicate that authoritative parenting style to be positively associated with students' academic achievement across all school level. However, some of the studies have concluded that this association is not consistent across ethnicity, culture and socioeconomic status (Dornbush et al., 1987; Steinberg et al. 1992; & Leung et al., 1998). Authoritative parenting was positively associated with Grade Point Average for white families but not for Asian, Black, and Hispanic (Dornbush et al., 1987; Steinberg et al. 1992). In addition some researchers have claimed that parental expectations for their child educational attainment have the strongest impact on academic performance compared with other types of parental involvement construct such as participation in school events, parent child communication and help in homework (Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Singh et al., 1995). Furthermore, studies also reveal that parents' educational expectations have a significant impact at elementary level than in later grades (Jeynes, 2007).

Parents' home based involvement and school based involvement have also been found positively related to academic performance. In home based involvement strategies such as checking homework or helping in homework has been found inconsistently associated with academic achievement as compared to other types of home based involvement. Parents' School based involvement including volunteering at school, visiting the school, and attending school events are also positively associated with the academic performance but this association becomes weaker when students move from elementary school level to upper school level (middle or high school). At upper school level schools are large and complex, students have multiple teachers and it becomes difficult for parents to build warm relation with each teacher and spend sufficient time in school. Moreover at upper school level students become more independent and responsible so they do not want their parents to visit the school (Stevenson & Baker, 1987).

Overall, most of the view of authors and finding of the studies in this literature review have concluded that parental involvement, whether at home or at school, have a positive relationship with students' academic performance. Furthermore, the impact of this positive relationship tend to fall as children get older or as they entered in higher schools level but we can't deny the importance of parental involvement practices during the entire period of students' schooling to ensure their positive development and better academic performance.

### ***Acknowledgments***

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

## VIEWPOINT

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## K-12 Virtual Schooling, COVID-19, and Student Success

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has significantly affected K-12 education in 2020.<sup>1</sup> To protect students and staff, as well as to flatten the infection curve, parents, teachers, and policy makers endorsed and implemented a modified version of homeschooling in the spring in the US and across the globe. Teachers used some form of paper mailings and electronic technology (eg, video conferencing, emailing) to deliver content to students, while parents assumed a coteaching responsibility. Most parents, schools, and teachers were unprepared and untrained to handle the complexities inherent to educating as well as the demands of the technology needed to support these efforts. Although teachers deserve high praise for their rapid response, the educational outcomes were unsatisfying, families were burdened, and most are hesitant to repeat the same format. As government officials attempt to plan for the fall, the American Academy of Pediatrics released a statement supporting the return to traditional school as soon as possible to preserve education and socialization while limiting the exacerbation of existing educational disparities for high-risk populations.<sup>2</sup>

This unprecedented spring transition was an introduction to K-12 online learning for many educators and families. However, K-12 online learning started in the mid-1990s under the broad label of *K-12 online and blended instruction* (blended refers to the use of both face-to-face and online formats). While more than a billion children worldwide newly experienced this pandemic-related abrupt transition to online education, at least 2% of US students and many more globally had already been participating in online instruction from K-12 online or virtual schools.<sup>3</sup> As policy makers, health care professionals, and parents prepare for the fall semester and as public and private schools grapple with how to make that possible, a better understanding of K-12 virtual learning options and outcomes may facilitate those difficult decisions.

Virtual schooling is the delivery of instruction through technology to students physically separated from their teachers. Formal virtual schools exist nationwide at all levels from kindergarten through 12th grade for both general and special education. At the elementary school level, online learning typically requires parental involvement and facilitation. Students at the middle school and high school levels often independently communicate via email, text, telephone, or video for group and individualized learning. Virtual schooling classes are frequently asynchronous, where students and teachers do not have to be online at the same time, allowing for learning anytime and any place.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the rapid transfer of face-to-face curriculum into an online format in spring 2020, virtual schools use curriculum designed specifically for online instruction. These schools

mostly employ teachers who are experienced online educators and often have online teaching certificates and graduate degrees that specifically include online education. Virtual schools also focus their ongoing professional development around online teaching and learning practices.<sup>5</sup>

Just like the myriad options that are available for face-to-face schooling in the US, virtual schooling exists in a complex landscape of for-profit, charter, and public options. For example, in Florida, school districts have partnered with Florida Virtual School, a state-funded public entity. Florida Virtual School provides counties with curricula and, in some cases, both curriculum and instruction for K-12 online classes. Students can take 1 or all Florida Virtual School classes channeled through their local public school. This partnership, which includes highly trained online instructors and high-quality curriculum specifically adapted for online delivery, produces similar or better performance when compared with face-to-face high school students on required state end-of-course examinations.<sup>6</sup> However, not all virtual schools are created or maintained equally. Parents need to seek reviews and ask for educational outcomes from each virtual school system to assess the quality of the provided education.

Importantly, K-12 virtual schooling is not suited for all students or all families. Individual students need to be motivated, organized, and supported. Differences in their environment, meaning their access to instructional support as well as their internet access, can cause significant variations in student success. Finally, while research is scant, 1 review indicates that specific teaching strategies used in online and blended environments can have a dramatically positive effect on outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

One of the more recent and promising advantages of virtual K-12 schooling is to meet the educational needs of children with special health care needs. Research supports that online learning can be a more suitable solution than attending a face-to-face school, especially when a student may experience frequent absences due to illness and/or frequent visits for chronic health management. Preliminary work by these authors has found that children who qualified for hospital homebound programs and chose to enroll in a K-12 course performed at least as well, or potentially better, than their nonhospital homebound peers. Moreover, children with special health care needs felt more in control of their education when participating in online learning.<sup>8</sup>

Many schools are still considering online or blended instruction as a necessary alternative or hybrid as this pandemic evolves. Also, many families may be considering whether some or all of their child's current or future education could take place online. As such, parents should evaluate the unique strengths and needs of their children by considering the following questions:

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1. Can their child maintain a study schedule and complete assignments with limited supervision?
2. Would their child be able to ask for help and effectively communicate with a teacher via telephone, text, email, or video?
3. Does their child have an intrinsic drive to learn skills, acquire knowledge, and complete assignments?
4. Does their child possess foundational reading, writing, math, and computer literacy skills?

Parents should also learn more about the virtual school options available to them. They should seek to understand the following:

1. How will student information be shared with their local school district?
2. Is the virtual school accredited?
3. How does the virtual school comply with state standards for K-12 educators (eg, licensure)?
4. Are Universal Design for Learning<sup>9</sup> standards incorporated into instructional materials?
5. What support does the school provide for children with special needs?

6. What expectations does the school have for parents/caregivers?
7. What technology is necessary for participation? Who is responsible for providing it?
8. How will the virtual school facilitate communication about their child's unique needs?

The pandemic has encouraged many parents to explore educational alternatives, particularly for students who may have health concerns such as those with respiratory disease or who are immunocompromised. With social distancing creating obstacles for traditional education, K-12 online learning may become more mainstream. For more information, consider the Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute's parent guide to online learning<sup>10</sup> and the Universal Design for Learning.<sup>9</sup> Future studies of the intersection of educational and health outcomes can clarify the effect of education on health and health on education. The COVID-19 pandemic offers a unique challenge for educators, policy makers, and health care professionals to partner with parents to make the best local and individual decisions for children.

#### ARTICLE INFORMATION

**Published Online:** August 11, 2020.

doi:[10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.3800](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.3800)

**Conflict of Interest Disclosures:** None reported.

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## **HOME LEARNING IN TIMES OF COVID: PARENTS' EXPERIENCES, DIFFICULTIES AND COPING STRATEGIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**PURPOSE.** The purpose of this research study was to explore the parents' experiences of home learning in times of COVID-19 their difficulties and their coping strategies.

**RESEARCH PROBLEM.** How does parents overcome the difficulties experienced on home learning in times of covid 19?

**METHODOLOGY.** A descriptive qualitative study was planned to explore the challenges of parents about home learning and management during COVID-19 to get an insight into real-life experiences regarding their difficulties and their coping strategies.

**CONCLUSIONS.** Based from the findings of the study, the researcher concluded the following:

1. Home learning foster difficulties in this pandemic time such as retrieval and distribution process of the learning packages, simultaneous roles at home, education and work and health related restrictions.
2. For the strategies encountered in modular distance learning includes the proper time management, constant communication with the adviser regarding the distribution and retrieval of the learning packages and lessons which are very hard to understand and the attitude towards the new normal learning.

**SIGNIFICANCE.** This action research was conducted to help teachers and school administrators to adjust their plans regarding home learning in collaboration with parents.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, home learning, modular distance learning, parents' difficulties

### **INTRODUCTION:**

An overwhelming majority of the world's enrolled students have experienced the temporary closing of school during the COVID-19 pandemic in an attempt to encourage social distancing and therefore decelerate the transmission of the virus (Viner et al., 2020). Countrywide lockdowns have strongly impacted the lives of people of all occupations and all ages. The flare-up has also affected the education system across the world and has altered the lives of 1,576,021,818 learners in 188 countries (UNESCO, 2020). The lockdowns have put an unprecedented challenge on the governments to ensure that there should be continuity of learning (Chang & Yano, 2020). Nearly 200 countries shut down schools with over 90% of

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these learners ranging from early years through higher education facing some sort of disruption to their education (UNESCO, 2020). School closures have unprecedentedly altered the daily lives of the student learners, their families, and their educators.

Parental involvement is an important factor for student achievement in traditional school settings. Parent support has demonstrated significant contributions to the success of learners (Borup et al., 2014; Feng & Cavanaugh, 2011; Lee & Figueroa, 2012; Makrooni, 2019; Woofter, 2019). However, parents must take on new and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities as their children participate in education while experiencing increasing instructional responsibility for their child's learning. As a result, parents often struggle with understanding the role they should play in their children's learning (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2009).

As the opening of classes run in the extraordinarily school year, the DepEd adopted the BE-LCP which permits multiple learning delivery modalities including modular distance learning (MDL), online distance learning (ODL), TV/Radio-Based Instruction (TV/R), and Blended Learning – a combination of different distance learning modalities. The MDL involves the use of self-learning modules (SLMs) either in print or digital format/electronic copy and various learning resources like learner's materials, textbooks, activity sheets, worksheets, study guides and other study materials. The ODL allows live synchronous instruction which requires stable internet connection but is more interactive than the other types of distance learning. The TV/R utilizes SLMs converted to video lessons for Television-Based Instruction as well as radio script for Radio-based instruction. To help learners, parents, and teachers successfully adopt these learning delivery modalities, SLMs are made available in print and offline/online digital formats.

As much as these initiatives are found to be appropriate to address the need of the time, it has also given a tough routine to parents who are working from home and simultaneously taking the responsibility that their children's learning process continues seamlessly during the times of COVID-19. Hence, the purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of home learning in times of COVID-19 from parents' experiences, their difficulties and coping strategies.

Based from the data gathered, parents prefer to use modular distance learning in Arawan Elementary School. Since face-to-face classes are not yet allowed, the DepEd will implement Blended/Distance learning wherein the combination of the various distance learning modalities such as printed modules, offline digital modules, online, and TV and Radio-based instruction will be used by students and teachers when classes formally start (Malipot, 2020). The researcher wanted to determine parents' experiences and difficulties and their strategies to overcome these difficulty. Hence, this study was conducted.

## Research Problem

This research study was undertaken to determine the experiences and difficulties encountered by parents on home learning in times of COVID

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences and difficulties encountered by parents on home learning in times of COVID?

2. What are the strategies used by parents in overcoming the difficulties experienced on home learning?
3. What plan of action may be derived based from the result of the study?

### **Research Approach**

Self-devised questionnaires was used to collect data. Collecting answers were done through private messages, video calls and face to face interaction during the retrieval and distribution of learning packages in learning kiosks or in school. The data collection happened in different time so as to minimize face to face interaction among the informants and the researcher. The questions were validated by a master teacher and the school principal. The responses were carefully recorder, transcribed and coded in themes. Data collection was held on December 2021 to March 2022. The results were utilized for the adjustment of the Learning Continuity Plan regarding the modular distance learning.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This part contains the methodology that the researcher used to complete this research work. It exposes the research design, respondents of the study, research instrument, data-gathering procedures, and statistical treatment of data

Descriptive qualitative study was used to explore the experiences and difficulties of parents about home learning and management during COVID-19 to get an insight into real-life experiences.

There were 15 key informants in the study. The study was conducted in Arawan Elementary School, school year 2021-2022.

Self-devised questionnaires was used to collect data. Collecting answers were done through private messages, video calls and face to face interaction during the retrieval and distribution of learning packages in learning kiosks or in school. The data collection happened in different time so as to minimize face to face interaction among the informants and the researcher. The questions were validated by a master teacher and the school principal. The responses were carefully recorder, transcribed and coded in themes. Data collection was held on December 2021 to March 2022. The results were utilized for the adjustment of the Learning Continuity Plan regarding the modular distance learning.

Responses of the key informants were translated and coded using thematic coding, which involves identifying passages of text linked by the common theme (Gibbs, 2007). This coding process allows for the categorization of codes, ultimately enabling thematic analysis of ideas. The researchers utilized the descriptive open coding to analyzed parental responses regarding their experiences, difficulties and coping strategies experienced during the COVID school closure.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1. Difficulties Experienced on Home Learning**

| Themes                                     | Informants' Transcribed Answers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Retrieval and Distribution process / times | <p><i>"Hindi ako, sigurado sa schedule ng pagkuha at pagdadala ng module sa aming barangay"</i></p> <p><i>Ang schedule (oras at araw) ng pagkuha at pagdadala ng mga module ay hindi pare-pareho bawat linggo.</i></p> <p><i>"Nahihirapan ako sa halos linggo linggo na pagkuha ng module. Mas maganda sana kung mga pandalawahang linggo ang nakahanda"</i></p>                                                    |
| Roles at home and work                     | <p><i>"Nahihirapan ako sa oras dahil sa dami ng gawain sa bahay at sa trabaho"</i></p> <p><i>"Pareho kami ng aking asawa na nagtatrabaho kaya madalas hindi na nababantayan at naasikaso ang pag-aaral ng mga bata"</i></p> <p><i>"Sa dami ng mga anak na nag-aaral, hindi lahat ay napagtutuunan ng pansin. Sabay pa ang mga gawain sa bahay kaya madalas, may mga bahagi ng module na hindi nasasagutan "</i></p> |
| Parents' Educational Capacity              | <p><i>"Maraming mga aralin ang hindi ko maunawaan. Madalas ay hindi naming natatapos ang aralin kaya naipapasa ito ng walang sagot"</i></p> <p><i>"Marami sa mga aralin ay hindi ko alam sapagakat kahit ako ay elementarya lamang ang natapos"</i></p>                                                                                                                                                             |
| Health related problems                    | <p><i>"May mga panahon na hindi naming nakukuha ng tama sa schedule ang modules dahil sa health protocol. Kapag may sipon o ubo, hindi makapunta sa school"</i></p> <p><i>" Minsan, sa dami ng gawain, nastress ang mga bata. Lalo na kapag malapit na ang pasahan tapos di pa namin matulungan dahil sa sabay-sabay na gawain sa loob ng bahay"</i></p>                                                            |

Table 1 presents the difficulties experienced by the informants regarding home learning. It shows that during the retrieval and distribution process, parents' encounter difficulty due to schedule because it differs from time to time. There is no definite date and time making it hard for them to adjust their schedule. In different sitio, there were learning kiosk, but the schedule was not definite.

The second and third theme is about the roles at home and workplace and their educational capacity. It shows that simultaneous roles of parents at home seems to be a difficulty also. Their scheduled time for work is always the same with the retrieval and

distribution of learning package scheduled. Another notable answer from the informants is their education ability which is most of the times hard for them to explain thus the inability to finish their output on time is impossible. , parents are the one to get the module of their kids which became a challenge for them. It adds up to their everyday tasks as they also work and doing the household chores in their daily living (Bendijo, 2020).

Health related restriction is also included for the difficulties encountered by parents. With simple cough and cold parents won't come to school or in a learning kiosk because of the strict implementation of IATF health protocol. There are informants that they tend to ask their son/ daughter to get the modules even there is health protocol because of sickness. Though they are not allowed to go out because of the situation, they don't have a choice. The researcher take note that the school administrator must consider the result thus, helping the community to cope up with these difficulties. The lockdowns have put an unprecedented challenge on the school administrators to ensure that there should be continuity of learning (Chang & Yano, 2020)

The results above were strengthened by several theories regarding parent involvement in their child's education. Parental involvement is an important factor for student achievement in traditional school settings. Parent support has demonstrated significant contributions to the success of learners (Borup et al., 2014; Feng & Cavanaugh, 2011; Lee & Figueroa, 2012; Makrooni, 2019; Woofter, 2019). However, parents must take on new and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities as their children participate in education while experiencing increasing instructional responsibility for their child's learning. As a result, parents often struggle with understanding the role they should play in their children's learning (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2009).

**Table 2. Coping Strategies Employed on Home Learning**

| Themes                                               | Informants' Transcribed Answer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Proper time management                               | <p><i>"...maraming gawain ang dapat tapusin sa tahanan. Upang magawa ko ang aking tungkulin sa pag-aaral ng aking mga anak, kailangan kong gumising nang maaga at tapusin ang gagawin."</i></p> <p><i>"Magpapaalam muna sa aking amo tungkol sa schedule ng pagkuha ng learning materials bago pumunta sa aking trabaho"</i></p> <p><i>"Magkakaroon ng tamang pagpapalano ng aking schedule upang matulungan sa pag aaral ang aking mga anak"</i></p> <p><i>"..Maaring humingi ng tulong sa aking asawa, mga matatandang anak na magtulungan sa gawaing bahay para mabigyang pansin ang pagsasagot sa kanilang module."</i></p> |
| Constant communication with my daughter/ son adviser | <p><i>"Mag pm o kaya ay magtext sa guro ng aking anak kung kailan ang distribution at retrieval ng module"</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                          | <p><i>"Maging updated sa group chat tungkol sa distribution at retrieval ng mga module"</i></p> <p><i>"Para sa mga lesson na hindi ko alam, maaring naman sigurong magtanong sa guro sa pamamagitan ng text, pm o video call para sa paliwanag"</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Attitude towards the new normal learning | <p><i>"Kailangan kong tulungan ang aking anak sa kanyang pag-aaral. Babaguhin ko ang aking pananaw tungkol sa distance learning, na ito ay mahirap para sa akin at ang guro lamang ang may tungkulin na magturo"</i></p> <p><i>"Mahirap pagsabayin ang trabaho at pagtuturo sa aking mga anak. Pero kung magtutulong tulong ang lahat ng miyembro ng pamilya, masosolusyunan din ito"</i></p> <p><i>"Magkaroon ng positibong pananaw na makakaya kong pagsabayin ang gawain sa bahay, pagtatrabaho at pagtulong sa aking mga anak"</i></p> |

Table 2 shows the strategies of the parents/guardians on modular distance learning. For the topmost answer, proper time management is important. Parents tasks at home is endless, but with proper time management, everything can be done. Parents strategize in managing their simultaneous tasks thereby attending to their livelihood, household chores and education of their students (Bendijo, 2020).

The second theme is about the constant communication with the adviser through different platforms such as group chat and text messages on the process of modular distance learning. Due to the different modalities existing in social platforms and varied places, the community became anxious on the studies of their students (Quinones, 2020; Malipot, 2020). Communication affects the teaching-learning process (Zlatovic, 2020). Thus, parents/guardians made use of social platform to communicate and be informed of the process of modular distance learning. Social platform made communication easier for them (Anderson, 2018).

For the last theme, parents attitude towards new normal learning is important. Parents/guardians stated that they must sacrifice for their children's sake. Although, more difficulties can be experience in the coming days because of the learning situation, they must stay positive. Seeking also the cooperation and help of other members of the family will be of great help. This is supported by the Saviuc (2020), that positive attitude improves the likelihood that people will achieve their goal, speeds-up progress and makes them resilient to overcome the challenges and remain persistent in pursuit of their goal, which is the education of their students.

## CONCLUSION

Based from the findings of the study, the researcher concluded the following:



1. Home learning foster difficulties in this pandemic time such as retrieval and distribution process of the learning packages, simultaneous roles at home, education and work and health related restrictions.
2. For the strategies encountered in modular distance learning includes the proper time management, constant communication with the adviser regarding the distribution and retrieval of the learning packages and lessons which are very hard to understand and the attitude towards the new normal learning.

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# The Effectiveness and Challenges of Online Learning for Secondary School Students – A Case Study

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<https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v17i3.14514>

*Received:* 15 June 2021

*Accepted:* 20 July 2021

*Date Published Online:* 31 July 2021

*Published:* 31 July 2021

**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has forced an immediate implementation of online learning. However, little is known about its effectiveness and challenges faced by the students. Thus, this study is aimed at examining the effectiveness of online learning and the challenges that it presents to pupils' abilities to learn. This study employed a case study design using a survey questionnaire, administered to 99 students from a secondary school in Jasin, Melaka. Data were analysed descriptively (calculation of percentage and frequency). Generally, the findings indicated that the students have computers or smartphones and an internet connection at home. Besides, it was found that the ability and comfortability to use computers was high (>93%). However, their motivation in online learning was low (41.5%) and ability to work in a group was at a moderate level (66.7%). They also agreed that conventional teaching (face-to-face) was important for their learning (98%). These findings are valuable for the government, school administrators, teachers and parents to acknowledge the importance of well-equipped facilities and a stable internet connection for effective learning. However, it is recommended for future researchers to utilize a larger sample size and students from various backgrounds to better understand this issue.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; online learning; students' challenges; remote learning.

## 1. Introduction

On 25 January 2020, the Ministry of Health (MOH) confirmed the first cases of COVID-19. They involved three Chinese nationals entering Malaysia from Singapore through Johor (Berita Harian, 2020). Five days later, on 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that COVID-19 constituted a global public health emergency. By 11 March 2020, the WHO announced that the disease had become a pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). The global spread of COVID-19 prompted Malaysia to implement Phase 1 of the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) from 18 to 31 March 2020. This has since been followed by six further phases of CMCO, beginning on 1 September 2020 and lasting until 31 December 2020.

From 18 March 2020, all nurseries, government and private schools (including daily schools, boarding schools and international schools), tahfiz centres, and other primary, secondary and pre-university educational institutions were closed. These closures also affected every public and private higher education institution, as well as skill training institutes, nationwide. Although all of these institutions have reopened since the end of the CMCO period, several states have had to close



educational facilities again due to the recurrence of COVID-19. These included Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Sabah, Sarawak, Negeri Sembilan and Johor.

Inevitably, the closures affect the daily lives of students, teachers and any individual involved with educational organisations throughout the country. During the CMCO period, face-to-face teaching, which has been practised for a considerable length of time, had to be suspended (Ariffin, Halim & Darus, 2020; Ehwan Ngadi, 2020; Mansor, Zabrani, Jamaludin, Mohd Nor, Alias, & Mansor, 2021; Raheim, 2020; Samat, Awang, Hussing & Nawi, 2020). Given that it is unclear when the pandemic will subside, educational institutions around the world have initiated online learning to ensure that pupils' education can continue, even if they are at home.

Numerous studies have been conducted about the effectiveness of online learning, and the challenges and restrictions that it can cause to students have been considered. Among these are studies conducted by Hazwani et al. (2017), Irfan and Iman (2020), Awal et al. (2020), Wildana et al. (2020), Muhammad and Kainat (2020), and Nurul Haidah et al. (2020).

Irfan and Iman (2020) contend that online learning is ineffective and is conducted inappropriately. They demonstrate this with reference to several factors, such as unsuitable internet facilities, teachers' inability to implement online learning, and the lack of cooperation given by parents. Contrastingly, Awal et al. (2020) found that online learning is effective but inefficient. They understand online learning to be effective as a response to the urgency of the pandemic; however, learning outcomes cannot be met, as it requires significant costs to purchase suitable internet packages.

Furthermore, Wildana et al. (2020) consider online learning to be effective as it facilitates the use of various applications such as 'Whatsapp', 'Zoom' and 'Google Classroom'. However, Wildana et al. also concur that internet access and internet packages restrict the effectiveness of online learning. A study by Muhammad and Kainat (2020) found that internet access problems, a lack of interaction between teachers and students and a lack of technological facilities challenge the efficacy of online learning. According to a study conducted by Hazwani et al. (2017), an institution's infrastructure plays a significant role in ensuring that online learning operates successfully. Poor infrastructure will limit students' ability to access the internet.

Students' attitudes also influence the effectiveness of online learning. Students who approach online learning carelessly present a challenge that all stakeholders should work to overcome (Hazwani et al., 2017). This is supported by Nurul Haidah et al. (2020), as they assert that students should take the opportunity to learn, improve their interpersonal skills, and enhance their adaptability to new technologies.

In the light of the aforementioned studies, online learning is effective in certain places. However, obstacles and challenges in the implementation of online learning remain. Among these, poor internet access in schools, campuses and residential areas, the cost of internet packages, issues with technological facilities, and students' attitudes are highlighted. To address them, existing infrastructures should be upgraded to enhance the effectiveness of online learning for students. Therefore, all stakeholders, particularly educators and students, need to adapt to this new norm. This adaptability is defined by the capacity to transform current behaviour in response to a new situation (Nurul Haidah et al., 2020). In other words, whether they want to or not, educators and students should strive to increase their knowledge of technology to manage their studies effectively. This is particularly important as part of learning new technological approaches to education.

In response to these issues, this study assesses the effectiveness of online learning and considers the challenges that it presents to pupils' abilities to learn.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 COVID-19**

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) attacks the immune system and can cause death. The rapid spread of the virus can also cause people to suffer from anxiety which, in turn, can lead to psychosocial impacts, such as shortness of breath and dizziness (Tarista, 2020).



## **2.2 Online Learning**

Online learning (e-learning) describes any form of pedagogy delivered using digital technology. Such methods incorporate visual graphics, text, animations, videos and audio. In addition, online pedagogy can also facilitate group learning, and the assistance of instructors within specific fields (Wan Aziaris, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, online learning is defined as a teaching and learning process between teachers and pupils that involves various digital mediums, such as 'Whatsapp', 'Zoom', and 'Google Classroom'. In addition, online learning does not refer to direct learning alone. Any assignments or activities, provided by the teacher online, are considered part of online learning.

According to Ratheeswari (2018), in the digital age, the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) allows students to learn and apply the skills that they need in the 21st Century. Furthermore, online learning is the best medium by which to ensure the continuity of students' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ariffin et al., 2020; Fauziana, 2020; Mansor et al., 2021; Raheim, 2020; Samat et al., 2020). According to Pusvyta Sari (2015), online learning is an alternative pedagogy for the era of technological development and communication, and students in particular need to adapt.

Mat Dawi et al. (2016) found that, in the midst of globalisation and the advancement of ICT, technology-based and online learning is highly encouraged. The management of pedagogical processes should be conducted creatively and undergo innovation to facilitate interaction between teachers and students. By interacting online, instructors and educators remain connected with their students notwithstanding being in different locations (Hussin, 2017). Technology-based teaching and learning techniques should be applied within schools and universities by public or private agencies. These methods should be implemented in accordance with the requirements of digital learning, and participants should experience constant interaction without the need for face-to-face communication (Duff, 2008). Various educational technology should be employed to ensure that students feel excited to learn, and to resolve any discrepancies between the consistency of students' learning experiences online, as opposed to face-to-face.

Interactive online learning allows students to uncover new information by exploring digital libraries and websites. As further technologies are introduced to the field of education, distance learning facilitates the global dissemination of information and knowledge (Hasifah, 2020). She contends that online learning is important because it can enable more effective self-learning. Students can choose the time they spend, the content they learn, and the direction of their learning. Students also have the opportunity to revisit challenging topics until they feel confident in their understanding. Furthermore, online learning allows students to study in a "safe" environment, without experiencing embarrassment about asking questions.

According to Harrison (2018), young children can access pictures and videos, navigate 'Youtube', and interact and participate in games and digital applications that are suited to their age. Generations Y and Z evidently possess the greatest experience of ICT facilities, thereby making it easier for these groups to utilise online learning. According to Fauziana (2020), students can revisit their lessons by re-watching recordings made by the educator, and obtain information from books or using the internet to strengthen their knowledge. Educators and students can also conduct bilateral communication, as messages can be exchanged during a lecture using the meeting software's chat column, 'Whatsapp', 'Telegram', video calls or phone calls. Students can also review their lessons using Education TV on DIdikTV channels. This is particularly useful for students expecting to take the following examinations: the Form 5 Malaysia Certificate of Education (SPM), the Form 3 Assessment Test (PT3) and the Standard 6 Primary School Assessment Test (UPSR).

## **2.3 Theory of Planned Behaviour**

The Theory of Planned Behaviour as described by Ajzen (2002) explains the relationship between beliefs and behaviour intention. This theory has been widely adopted in explaining how behaviour is developed in various fields including education (Barnard-Bark, Burley & Crooks, 2010).

Attitude, perceived behavioural control and subjective norm are among influential factors that lead to behavioural intentions. Generally, attitude refers to personal encounters or experiences that lead

an individual to perform a specific behaviour intention (Datnow, 2020). Pasani, Amelia and Hassan (2020) asserted that attitude towards the use of technology in learning plays a pivotal part in developing acceptance to use the technology. Undeniably, the shift from face-to-face to online learning has provided students with personal experiences in using technology as a learning platform during the pandemic. Thus, their attitude might lead to behaviour intention to use technology for learning.

On the other hand, perceived behavioural control refers to one's view and perception of their ability to conduct or act in certain behaviour. In the context of technology acceptance, Davis (1989) explains that perceived ease to use and perceived usefulness are the factors that lead the integration of technology in enhancing organizational performances. If students found that the technology is easy to be used or useful in helping them to learn, this will lead to the development of perceived behavioural control.

Whereas, subjective norm refers to an individual's perspective on a certain behaviour that is determined by the opinions of others. Thus, the subjective norm is shaped by their surroundings or social environment. In relation to the use of online learning, subjective norm plays an important part in determining behavioural intention. However, there are a number of research that argue the relationship between surroundings and behaviour intention to use technology. For instance, Eksail and Afari (2020) and Shiue (2007) agreed that one's surroundings have a minimal impact on intention to use technology.

In the context of online learning, the aforementioned factors play an important part in shaping students' intention and acceptance to use technology in their learning. If students have a positive attitude, perceived behavioural control and are in encouraging surroundings, the intention to utilize technology to the fullest will definitely contribute to effective and meaningful learning.

## **2.4 Pupils' Perspective on Online Learning**

Behaviour is strongly influenced by an individual's attitudes. Positive attitudes result in positive behaviour and negative attitudes always cause negative behaviour (Hazwani et al., 2020). This observation corresponds with the nature of students' engagement with e-learning (online learning). Several studies have highlighted the challenges and opportunities associated with e-learning during the pandemic (Mailizar et al., 2020). Researchers endeavour to understand the benefits and obstacles that various stakeholders involved in e-learning have experienced. Based on the work of Mailizar et al. (2020), the student's voice is a significant consideration in this context. Therefore, further research is necessary to identify the challenges that restrict students' abilities to achieve their goals.

Hazwani et al. (2017) have concluded that students' attitudes influence the effectiveness of e-learning. Accordingly, students that are optimistic and enthusiastic will not experience e-learning as an obstacle to their academic success. Adnan (2020) found that students felt that conventional learning differed greatly from online learning. Furthermore, students felt that face-to-face learning is crucial for effective learning, and that group assignments are difficult to complete online.

According to Hazwani et al. (2020), not all students and organisations enjoy e-learning. To ensure that e-learning can be used extensively, independently, and to the greatest effect, it is important to identify which factors affect its use. E-learning also demands that users be more self-motivated to learn. The findings of the previous study are supported by Surjono et al. (2015), who state that e-learning can produce a flexible and distributed learning system. Students will be able to choose the time and location in which they study because they are not required to attend a certain place at a specific time. Distributed learning describes a process whereby instructors, students and learning materials are located in different areas so that students can learn the level of time and place limitations.

## **2.5 Challenges Affecting Online Learning**

According to Wildana et al. (2020), the online learning models used during the COVID-19 pandemic equipped students with knowledge in a similar way to face-to-face learning. However, online learning provides more experience will be the importance of process learning that balances the development of time and technology based on self-regulatory capabilities, which is definitely owned by each student. According to Wildana et al. (2020), the regulations enforced by the head of an educational institution are most important when delivering online learning.

The availability of the internet and the cost of internet packages determine the continuity of online learning. However, in practice, this study found that students experienced limited internet access because of their geographical location, or as a result of limited finances with which to purchase internet packages. Students' level of literacy, and their ability to access online learning, is also crucial to the effectiveness of online learning. Hazwani et al. (2020) found that internet connection was the most significant factor to influence the effectiveness of e-learning. Hazwani et al. (2020) contend that management personnel need to improve dormitory areas to provide all students with access to the internet. Internet connection must be moderate or good in order to suffice.

Moreover, students need to experience modern technologies in order to adapt to current circumstances. Never using this application does not mean not having to take note of technology. Students should familiarise themselves with various online applications so that their knowledge is up-to-date. Digital technology is extremely useful and benefits students that use it in a positive way (Hamimi, 2018). The spread of COVID-19 has triggered the development of new pedagogical models and online learning applications to facilitate the achievement of learning goals (Schneider & Council, 2020). In response, innovation in the field of education should continue to ensure that this development does not cease (Verawardina et al., 2020).

According to Nurul Haidah et al. (2020), students keep pace with social change by adapting to the availability of new technologies. This adaptation is crucial, as modern life is embedded in technology. Once these skills have been attained, students are able to adapt regardless of their circumstances and respond to the emergence of new or familiar problems. Consequently, students will possess a variety of technology skills that they can apply in the future. This initiative has encouraged the use of ICT and social media applications as an important platform to help teenagers and students engage in remote learning. These initiatives and recommendations prioritise students that will take important examinations, such as the SPM, PT3 and UPSR, which impact the instructions introduced during the CMCO. However, the existence of social media and modern communication applications still allows teachers to direct students' online learning experiences (Nor Shela & Mohd Shafi 2020).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Study Design**

This study employs a case study design because it is relevant in collecting rich data and information on a specific event that affect how individuals react and change their behaviour (Chua, 2020). Since the sudden change in teaching and learning delivery during the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), this situation might affect how they react and change their behaviour in the online learning settings. In fact, this situation is still new and little evidence is available on its effectiveness. Therefore, in this study, in order to examine the effectiveness of online learning and the challenges that it presents to pupils' abilities to learn, a survey questionnaire has been utilized.

According to Chua (2020), a survey questionnaire is helpful to provide direct information from the respondents on their personal encounters, experiences and perception of an issue. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire that consists of two aspects: a) investigating students' perceptions about the effectiveness of online learning, and b) the challenges related to their online learning facilities, was designed and distributed with the support of the class teacher.

A total of 99 pupils, aged 15-16, from a single secondary school in Jasin, Melaka were selected using the convenience sampling technique. This is because this study is not aimed at testing a research hypothesis to be generalized to the population but to develop an understanding (Chua, 2020) of students' perceptions about the effectiveness of online learning, and the challenges related to their online learning facilities. In this study, from a total of 99 pupils, 63 respondents were female and 36 were male. All of the respondents were receiving full-time online learning due to the CMCO that was re-implemented from 9 November 2020 until 6 December 2020.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

The responses from the survey were analysed by calculating the percentage and frequency using Microsoft Excel software. Since this study identified frequency and percentage for each item in the questionnaire, the interpretation of these findings was based on Nurul and Suziyani's (2018) suggestion for percentage score interpretation. As presented in Table 1, if an item achieved a percentage score between 0% and 49%, the level of agreement on the item statement was considered as low. Based on the standard norm, a 50% score is considered a mean score, while a score of 75% or above is considered to be within the highest quartile (Azriah et al., 2019).

**Table 1.** Interpretation of percentage scores.

| Percentage score | Score interpretation |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 75% to 100%      | High                 |
| 54% to 74%       | Moderate             |
| 0% to 49%        | Low                  |

Source: Nurul & Suziyani (2018)

## 4. Findings

Of the 99 respondents, 52.1% were aged 15-16 (n = 51), and 47.9% (n = 48) were aged 16-17. Furthermore, 39.8% of students (n = 39) were from rural areas, while 60.2% (n = 61) lived in urban areas.

### 4.1 Students' perceptions about the effectiveness of online learning

Table 2 provides a summary of students' responses on the effectiveness of online learning. It was found that 92.9% (n=92) of the respondents agreed (moderately agree; agree; strongly agree) that they felt comfortable and eligible to use electronic devices for online learning. Also, it was found that they highly agreed that (93.9%, n=93) they were comfortable using electronic communication equipment.

**Table 2.** Pupils' Perspectives of Online Learning

| No. | Item                                                       | Frequency     |               |               |               |               | Total of agreement (MA, A and SA) | Interpretation |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
|     |                                                            | SD            | D             | MA            | A             | SA            |                                   |                |
| 1.  | I feel I am eligible to use the computer.                  | 2<br>(2.0%)   | 4<br>(4.0%)   | 26<br>(26.3%) | 38<br>(38.4%) | 28<br>(28.3%) | 92<br>(92.9%)                     | High           |
| 2.  | I am comfortable using electronic communication equipment. | 1<br>(1.0%)   | 4<br>(4.1%)   | 24<br>(24.2%) | 33<br>(33.3%) | 36<br>(36.4%) | 93<br>(93.9%)                     | High           |
| 3.  | Effectiveness – there is no difference between online      | 28<br>(28.3%) | 33<br>(33.3%) | 25<br>(25.3%) | 9<br>(9.1%)   | 4<br>(4.0%)   | 38<br>(38.4%)                     | Low            |

| No. | Item                                                                           | Frequency     |               |               |               |               | Total of agreement (MA, A and SA) | Interpretation |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
|     |                                                                                | SD            | D             | MA            | A             | SA            |                                   |                |
|     | learning and conventional learning.                                            |               |               |               |               |               |                                   |                |
| 4.  | I am motivated when using online learning compared with conventional learning. | 24<br>(24.2%) | 34<br>(34.3%) | 31<br>(31.3%) | 8<br>(8.1%)   | 2<br>(2.1%)   | 41<br>(41.5%)                     | Low            |
| 5.  | I can complete group assignments using online learning.                        | 12<br>(12.1%) | 21<br>(21.2%) | 36<br>(36.4%) | 22<br>(22.2%) | 8<br>(8.1%)   | 66<br>(66.7%)                     | Average        |
| 6.  | Conventional or face-to-face learning with teachers is important.              | 2<br>(2.0%)   | 0<br>(0%)     | 8<br>(8.1%)   | 27<br>(27.3%) | 62<br>(62.6%) | 97<br>(98.0%)                     | High           |

\*SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; MA=Moderately Agree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree

However, in terms of effectiveness, the respondents expressed that conventional learning (face-to-face) is highly important (98%, n=97). Interestingly, 98% of respondents (n=97) felt that learning face-to-face is more effective than online learning. It was also found that they disagreed with the statement: there is no difference between online learning and conventional learning, in terms of its effectiveness. This is because the level of agreement was found to be low (38.4%, n=38)

In addition, the data suggested that only 41.5% (n=41) of the respondents felt motivated by online learning. This demonstrates the ineffectiveness of online learning compared with conventional classroom learning. In terms of their ability to complete group assignments using online learning, the level of agreement was moderate (66.7%, n=66).

#### 4.2 Respondents' online learning facilities: The challenges

To learn online, respondents must have the correct facilities – namely a smartphone, computer device and internet access. This is the first challenge to solve in order to facilitate online learning.

Table 3 presents information about the online learning facilities that respondents owned. The data indicate that 93.9% of respondents (n=93) had internet access, which is good, but that 61.1% (n=61) had a limited internet connection or a weak signal. This is likely to be due to the level of infrastructure. Meanwhile, 14.7% of participants (n=14) had limited internet access due to its cost, and they could not afford a stronger or more stable internet connection.

**Table 3.** Online Learning Facilities

| No.                                                                                  | Item                                        | Frequency  | Total      | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| Online learning challenges: internet access at home.                                 |                                             |            |            |                |
| 1.                                                                                   | Broadband Internet line                     | 30 (30.6%) | 93 (93.9%) | High           |
| 2.                                                                                   | Smartphone Internet data line               | 63 (63.3%) |            |                |
| 3.                                                                                   | None                                        | 6 (6.1%)   | 6 (6.1%)   | Low            |
| Online learning challenges: computer facilities.                                     |                                             |            |            |                |
| 4.                                                                                   | My own                                      | 29 (29.3%) | 77 (77.8%) | High           |
| 5.                                                                                   | Use with Family                             | 48 (48.5%) |            |                |
| 6.                                                                                   | None                                        | 22 (22.2%) | 22 (22.2%) | Low            |
| Online learning challenges: smartphone facilities.                                   |                                             |            |            |                |
| 7.                                                                                   | My Own                                      | 77 (77.8%) | 97 (98%)   | High           |
| 8.                                                                                   | Use with family                             | 20 (20.2%) |            |                |
| 9.                                                                                   | None                                        | 2 (2.0%)   | 2 (2.0%)   | Low            |
| Online learning challenges: I get limited internet access for the following reasons. |                                             |            |            |                |
| 10.                                                                                  | High financial cost                         | 14 (14.7%) | 14 (14.7%) | Low            |
| 11.                                                                                  | Signal problems/internet access limitations | 61 (61.1%) | 61 (61.1%) | Moderate       |
| 12.                                                                                  | Other reasons                               | 24 (24.2%) | 24 (24.2%) | Low            |

The data also indicate that 6.1% of students (n=6) did not have internet access at home, and 22.2% (n=22) did not have computer facilities at home. Only 29.3% (n=29) had their own personal computer and 48.5% (n=48) shared technology with family members. Most respondents had their own smartphone device (77.8%, n=77), while 20.2% (n=20) shared smartphones with their family (parents or siblings). By contrast, only 2% (n=2) of participants did not have smartphones, but the majority were likely to use computers for online learning.

Within the data concerning the infrastructural challenges, the majority of respondents aged 15-17 owned either a smartphone or a personal computer at home. This enabled them to undertake online learning. However, they did experience limited internet access at home due to connectivity problems (61.1%; n=61). This is largely the result of infrastructural layout – a factor which students are unable to control or address.

## 5. Discussion

The majority of respondents expressed that they were qualified, confident and comfortable using computers, and electronic communications equipment (such as smartphones), during their online learning sessions. As explained in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Ajzen (2002) justified that perceived behavioural control which is contributed by the perceived ease to use and perceived usefulness (Davis, 1989) have helped to develop a sense of confidence and comfort for these students

to use the electronic communication equipment. Undeniably, the sudden closure of the school and the implementation of online learning has provided personal experiences and encounters that shaped their attitudes towards online learning. The familiarity with the gadgets and computers among these students might be the reason why they felt comfortable and easy to learn via the online platforms. Samat et al. (2020) supported that the readily available online platforms that encourage social learning is found beneficial to enhance learning engagement between teachers and students, and students to students (Samat et al., 2020). Thus, this will create a positive learning environment for students.

Even though a number of students shared the gadgets with their siblings and/or other family members, they were still able to adapt and learn. Again, the exposure and familiarity to the gadgets from their surroundings have helped to shape their behaviour to use the electronic communication equipment for learning (Ajzen, 2002). As a result, the students were still able to participate and develop their knowledge and skills in using technology for online learning.

On the other hand, even though online learning is found as a suitable method of learning in this current situation (Ariffin et al., 2020; Duff, 2008; Hussin, 2017; Pusvyta Sari, 2015; Raheim, 2020; Samat et al., 2020), the findings indicated that only a small percentage of respondents felt they benefitted from online learning, and agreed that online learning did not motivate them to enjoy learning. Instead, they preferred conventional classroom methods. Hazwani et al. (2020) similarly found that students' motivation during online learning was low as this learning required students to be self-motivated and independent in their learning. In Samat et al.'s (2020) study, they found that intrinsic motivation is a predictor of student's intention to use online learning. Therefore, teachers should play an important role in designing learning that is engaging and interesting for students.

Interestingly, the current study has uncovered that students' learning was affected by limited internet access because of poor infrastructure and the high costs of internet packages. Most respondents noted that they did not have stable internet access and were unable to participate in class without disruptions. We believe that respondents' place of residence (urban vs. rural) may explain some of these issues, as almost 40% of respondents live in rural areas. Facilitating conditions are undoubtedly pivotal to students' learning motivation (Rahiem, 2020; Samat et al., 2020). With such challenges faced by these students, it was not surprising that their learning motivation was found to be 'low'.

Furthermore, Adnan (2020) and Hazwani et al. (2020) claimed that online learning is still new and unfavourable among students. Other than poor facilities at home, the unfamiliar learning environment such as 'different' learning activities and tasks that were new to the students might have affected their motivation to learn. As the tasks need to be completed online, they might feel that most of the tasks, such as group discussions, and assignments were challenging to be completed (Rahiem, 2020). These personal encounters affect how they perceived their learning.

## **5.1 Addressing the challenges**

In addition to ongoing technical and financial issues, online learning can be ineffective due to a lack of interaction between pupils and teachers and the absence of social relationships between pupils and teachers, and among pupils themselves, compared with conventional classes. This lack of social interaction has made it difficult for pupils to conduct group work virtually (Adnan, 2020; Hazwani et al., 2020). The lack of social interaction might also decrease learning motivation. Therefore, teachers need to improve their pedagogical methods and improvise aspects of the curriculum, to render it suitable for online learning.

Various ICT devices and internet packages are available at an affordable cost. Parents can choose their preferred package depending on their budget. With the widespread availability of mobile phones, computers, laptops, tablets, and other devices, and their increasingly accessible and user-friendly interface displays, more students and parents should be able to access the internet in their local area (Fauziana, 2020). Government bodies and telecom companies must also take the lead to ensure internet access across the country, and thereby provide high-quality learning experiences for every student.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, COVID-19 is impacting the pedagogical methods of academic institutions around the world. Schools, colleges, and universities are forced to conduct lectures and classes online, as an alternative method by which to continue students' learning. While online learning has been proven to support the health of students during the pandemic, it is not as effective as conventional learning. Additionally, the lack of a robust online infrastructure may impede the effectiveness of online learning. Teachers must improve students' experience of online learning by utilising effective pedagogical methods. Concurrently, the government must take responsibility and improve the existing online infrastructure and facilities. Nevertheless, support within school communities, and among parents and school administrators, is vital to ensure the success of online learning.

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Article in *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice* · March 2023

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# Parent Involvement with Their Children's Schools: Perceptions of Saudi Parents of Elementary School Students with Learning Disabilities

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This exploratory, qualitative study investigated the perceptions of Saudi Arabian parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities with regard to their involvement in their children's education. Guided by results of previous research conducted primarily with Western samples, and using a semistructured interview methodology followed by thematic phenomenological analyses, specific interview topics included parental perceptions of (a) the importance of parent–school partnerships, (b) the means of encouraging a parent–school relationship, and (c) how school practices may affect parental participation. The study involved 13 parents of children in elementary education (ages 7–12 years) diagnosed with learning disabilities. The results suggest several ways to overcome the involvement barriers reported by parents.

Parents are the primary caregivers of their children and typically have intimate knowledge about them. Parents, therefore, are in a good position to provide information that can assist educators in better assessing and understanding their pupils and facilitate connections between learning at home and learning in the classroom. Furthermore, when parents participate in school activities, they can connect with other families with children attending the same school. Additionally, parents can help a school improve its academic programs as well as its educational and social climate. Given the important role parents can play, maintaining successful parent–school relationships can increase the likelihood that that school successfully develops children's potential (Avnet et al., 2019; Epstein, 2010; Starr & Foy, 2012). This is important for all children but for children with special needs, in particular.

## Parental Involvement in Education

The relationship between the school and parents is important, as evidenced by growing attention in the last few decades from researchers and practitioners in different fields, including psychology, sociology, and education (e.g., Harris & Goodall, 2008). Thus, a review of the literature reveals a broad range of studies, such as Hsiao (2016), focusing on parents' perceptions about their involvement in schools and home/school learning. However, a search for research in this domain specific to the Saudi Arabian context shows a severe lack of studies addressing parental perceptions about

their involvement in special education programs and schools (see Poon et al., 2013). This is a concerning observation for the Saudi educational context because schools on their own are not able to address the many challenges experienced by learners, especially learners with special needs.

Research has identified many benefits of collaboration between parents and the school. For instance, Kyriakides (2005) concluded that parental involvement strengthens children's learning. Furthermore, greater parental involvement with the school predicts reduced student absenteeism, increased student retention, and positive achievement in numeracy and literacy, together with improvements in classroom management of student behavior (Barger et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Based on the results of such research, educational departments are developing models that involve partnerships between schools and parents aimed at improving learning outcomes for all learners, but especially for students with disabilities (Porter, 2008).

## Parental Involvement in Special Education

Developments over the last few decades reflect a move away from a medical model of learning disability to a social model (Barnes, 2019). This has resulted in greater appreciation of the needs of families of children with learning disabilities and increased efforts to facilitate an environment in which parents participate in planning, delivering, and assessing the programs available to students. This is in keeping with the views of Porter (2008), for example, who argued that the most effective way to meet the needs of children is to involve parents. Specifically, this approach to intervention services seeks to assist families in accessing and influencing

services instead of waiting passively for services to be delivered (Carpenter, 2007). Thus, the development and implementation of a family-centered approach to special education, especially with elementary school-aged students with disabilities, provides parents with strategies for becoming effectively involved in their children's education by learning how to gain access to information and use of available resources (Espe-Sherwindt, 2008; Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

Engagement by parents in early intervention programs affords benefits to all children but is especially important for children who have learning disabilities, including the development of healthy attitudes towards their children's abilities, and in the process promoting family well-being (Jinah & Walters, 2008; Yotyodying & Wild, 2019). This is a view acknowledged by Wall (2003), who suggested that when the partnerships between teachers, parents, and learners are strong, the resulting positive outcomes benefit not just the children but also teachers and parents.

Although the literature documents benefits of collaboration between the school and home, it also identifies barriers to parental involvement in educating learners with disabilities in the school environment (Al-Dababneh, 2018). For example, based on a qualitative study of parental perceptions, Wehman and Gilkerson (1999) found that the leading barriers to parental involvement included the limited times during which teachers are available to parents and inefficient communication between teachers and parents. A similar study by Lamb-Parker et al. (2001) focused on barriers to participation for mothers with children in a Head Start program. The researchers concluded that mothers encountered many and varied challenges that made it difficult for them to participate. For instance, 50% of the participating mothers reported frequent feelings of depression and frustration with their child's educational experiences, particularly in the early stages of the Head Start program.

## Parental Involvement in Saudi Arabian Education

Saudi Arabian families in recent history have implicitly granted schools authority in decision-making with regard to their children's education (Alobaid, 2018). This can be attributed, at least in part, to Saudi culture, which encouraged parents not to question school administrators' and teachers' decisions. And as a result, the school system's structure did not expect, facilitate, or support parental involvement or collaboration with teachers and administrators (Alobaid, 2018).

Fortunately, things are beginning to change, and parental participation in children's education is an emerging topic in Saudi Arabia. The need for programs to facilitate and support parental involvement arose after a series of recent educational policy changes that afforded parent-teacher collaboration and cooperation (Alobaid, 2018). As a result, Saudi statutes now require schools to provide parents with opportunities to serve as equal partners with teachers and staff in their children's education (Alquraini, 2010; Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, 2002, 2008). Specifically, these statutes codify the importance of including parents as partners that can assist teachers in accomplishing goals in ser-

vice to the child's academic success, and this applies with equal force to children with learning disabilities.

Unfortunately, parent involvement programs remain uncommon in present-day Saudi Arabia. The majority of Saudi parents lack awareness of the parent involvement programs offered by schools, which has resulted in continued limitation and restriction of parents' access to the school community and to resources for assisting and monitoring their children's educational and developmental progress (Alobaid, 2018).

## Challenges to Sustainable and Effective School-Parent Partnerships

In this section, we address challenges to sustainable and effective school-parent partnerships, with reference to research conducted with Western populations. Unless otherwise noted, there is remarkably little comparable research with Middle Eastern populations, in general, and with Saudi populations, in particular. Part of the impetus for the current study was to begin to address this dearth of research.

An important challenge to the sustainability and effectiveness of school-parent partnerships is the lack of a uniform definition of "parental involvement." From a traditional perspective, parental involvement includes assisting children with homework, being involved with or volunteering in school activities, attending school events when invited, and maintaining communication with teachers (Bower & Griffin, 2011). However, some researchers include parenting practices and behaviors in their definition of parental involvement with children's education such as the importance of setting rules in the household related to education and parental aspirations for their children's academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005).

Teacher and administrator preparation is another challenge impacting effective school-parent partnerships (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Many school leaders and teachers do not receive adequate training in educator preparation programs on organizing, conducting, and employing practical strategies to develop and maintain partnerships with parents (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Additionally, they are often not provided with guidance on how to meet school mandates and educational policies requiring them to facilitate parental involvement, and neither are they provided with a clear sense of the desired outcomes.

As a result, although administrators and teachers often report that they are willing to involve parents in the school community, misperceptions and lack of preparation remain about how this can be accomplished, leaving many school leaders and teachers with the feeling that despite their efforts, parents are not engaged (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

A third challenge relates to the need for collaborative and trusting relationships (Harpaz & Grinshtain, 2020). For school-parent partnerships to succeed, relevant policy must be translated into action. Action requires the development of the school's capacity to encourage parents to be involved in school activities, for example. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) identified strategies for developing a school's parental involvement capacity, including establishing an inviting and

welcoming atmosphere, being conscious of parents' goals for their children's education, appreciating parents' perspectives on their children's culture and learning style, providing sufficient involvement opportunities, and investing consistent and systematic attention to improving parent–school relationships. If these strategies and conditions are in place, the result is a setting that more effectively encourages partnerships that benefit students from varying backgrounds (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), “When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns and honor their contributions, they are successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement” (p. 7).

### Research Questions Guiding the Current Study

The current study aimed to expand an understanding of the relationship between schools and parents. Given the dearth of research concerning parents' perceptions of parental involvement and partnerships with schools, our focus is on Saudi Arabian parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities.

Specifically, we explored Saudi parents' perceptions of parental involvement to determine why some parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities are involved in their children's education whereas others are not. The following questions guided the study: (a) What are parents' views on the importance of parent–school partnerships? (b) What are parents' views on the means that can be used to encourage and support a relationship between parents and the school? And (c) What are parents' views on how school practices around parental participation might affect that participation?

### Rationale and Significance of the Study

In the educational context, partnership generally denotes the collaboration of parents and teachers to successfully attain the goals of education for children. The Plowden Report (United Kingdom Department of Education & Science, 1967) describes a partnership between parents and teachers as integral to education development. Indeed, establishing partnerships in education is important for governments, countries, and families. For instance, when families work with the schools, children learn more effectively, leading to higher academic achievement. In addition, governments often discover that schools that work closely with families are better accountable to the communities that provide them with funding and assist them in meeting the demands of parents (Kelley-Laine, 1998).

In the current study, “parental involvement” refers to the level of a parent's interest and active participation in their child's academic progress. Furthermore, we distinguish between school-based and at-home parental involvement. The former refers to the interface between parents and the school regarding the child's education that occurs in the school, such as attending parent and teacher association meetings, volunteering to help during class field trips, at-

tending teacher–parent conferences, and active participation in other school activities. Parental involvement in the home context, on the other hand, refers to parental practices regarding the child's education outside the school. Examples include reading with the child, practicing academic skills with the child, talking to the child about issues related to the school, and assisting with homework (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

## METHODS

### Design

This study used a qualitative design in which data were collected using semistructured interviews with Saudi Arabian parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities. The qualitative design made it possible to explore and identify specific parental perceptions and to ask follow-up questions to provide clarity or to pursue specific elements about these parental perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

To uncover the lived experiences of individuals, various educational studies conducted in the last four decades have utilized phenomenography—a research strategy that explores phenomena perceived by others, uncovering and explaining the variation therein, particularly in an academic setting (Cohen et al., 2011). Rooted in qualitative methodology, phenomenography employs human interaction to investigate the study question using specific methods such as interviews and observation. It is recognized that qualitative researchers inevitably introduce their personal viewpoints, belief systems, and biases to their research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Therefore, this type of educational research must attend to the basic tenets of a research framework and the researcher's role in the study. Phenomenography is primarily concerned with describing conceptions, each depicting a unique experience of the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011). Consequently, the purpose of data analysis in phenomenographic research is to unearth variations in how the investigated phenomenon is encountered or experienced (Limberg, 2005).

### Participants

Public elementary school directors throughout Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, were asked to encourage parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities to participate in the study. In addition, they provided information about socioeconomic class, demographic, and geographic diversity of the sample. Thirteen parents agreed to participate. The demographic information available for the participants is displayed in Table 1.

### Procedure

The senior author received approval from the research ethics board of his university to conduct the study. The directors of

TABLE 1  
Participant Demographics ( $N = 13$ )

| <i>Variable</i>                  |            | <i>Frequency</i> |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------------|
| Gender of participant            | Male       | 9                |
|                                  | Female     | 4                |
| Age of participants (years)      | 30–40      | 5                |
|                                  | 41–50      | 7                |
|                                  | 51–60      | 1                |
|                                  | 7–8        | 3                |
| Age of child (years)             | 9–10       | 6                |
|                                  | 11–12      | 4                |
|                                  |            |                  |
| Education qualification          | Bachelor's | 10               |
|                                  | Master's   | 3                |
| Main student learning disability | Reading    | 9                |
|                                  | Writing    | 1                |
|                                  | Math       | 3                |

the participating schools assisted the researcher in identifying and enrolling participants. Parents expressing an interest in participating in the study were given an information letter describing the study and, subsequently, were encouraged to discuss the study with the researcher. Parents who agreed to participate signed a statement of informed consent prior to participating. Furthermore, before the interviews began, collaboration and permission were requested and obtained from the local education authorities for the schools that participated.

Semistructured interviews were chosen as they provide more flexibility to researchers than structured interviews. For example, they can be extended so that participants can include as much detail as they wish about their opinions and experiences. Semistructured interviews also incorporate some of the strengths of structured interviews, such as allowing for questions to be asked in an organized manner (Newby, 2014).

Interviews were conducted in person or by phone in a location convenient to the participant. Each interview lasted about 35 minutes and was guided by three questions: (a) As a parent, what is your view about the importance of school–parent partnerships? (b) What do you believe your responsibility is in the relationship between the school and home as a parent? And (c) What is your opinion about whether and how school practices encourage parental participation?

### Reliability and Validity

In psychometric contexts, “reliability” refers to the applicability of the measured concept across participants. Thus, greater reliability is obtained if a similar study produces a similar pattern of results (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Weinberg, 2002). In the current study, the researcher first invested time in developing trust and rapport with the participants, which facilitates engagement between the researcher and participant, with the result that participant

responses are more reliable (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We note that, during the interviews, the interaction between the participant and the researcher was kept professional by ensuring that the conversation was limited to the focus of the current research. When the interviews were transcribed, the researcher focused on and considered each word of the participant's response, with the text reread and listened to several times to minimize interpretive error.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) proposed that validity (i.e., the degree to which one is accurately assessing the intended variable) can and should be assessed repeatedly during the course of a study. Validity can be achieved to varying extents by ensuring that procedures and materials are subjected to questioning and control. According to Kvale and Brinkman, when considering validity, the focus is not on the outcomes or results. In the semistructured, qualitative interview context, the focus instead is on careful planning, designing, interviewing, transcribing, and data handling. For the current research, a pilot study was conducted to investigate the clarity of the interview questions, after which the questions were revised accordingly. Furthermore, in the main study, participants' responses were probed in a way that allowed for clarification, control, and validation. Generally, the interviews were conducted to ensure that the perceptions and attitudes of participants were portrayed and captured with accuracy.

To ensure the reliability and integrity of the study, we adhered to Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) guidelines for qualitative research in special education. Specifically, participants included diverse representatives of the target population, and the semistructured scripts were carefully crafted to be clear, open-ended, and suitable for exploring particular questions about social validity with various facilitators. To further ensure trustworthiness, data sources, including informal and formal field notes documented by the researcher, were triangulated with audio recordings and transcripts. Lastly, interview transcriptions were reviewed by independent experts in special education who confirmed that our study inferences were reasonable, based on their diverse experience (Brantlinger et al., 2005).



## Analysis

When the interview process was complete, audio recordings of the participants' responses were transcribed and categorized. Fundamental to the process of categorizing the responses was the use of phenomenography, which provides researchers with a means to capture the varying ways in which the participant perceives the world (Weinberg, 2002). Based on the suggestions of Weinberg (2002), to categorize responses efficiently, the lead researcher and senior author read a specific response from a participant several times. Focusing attention on the transcribed text allowed the researcher to identify the underlying perceptions. The researcher identified, interpreted, and labeled the resulting categories using specific names.

The categorization process was followed by a process of condensing meaning so that the meanings obtained from the participants could be summarized, as proposed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Based on insights from Hennink et al. (2015), after presentation of the main findings below, we attempted to create a balance with regard to presenting interpretative commentary and direct quotations from the interviewees.

Following the categorizations, significant statements and phrases about the phenomena of interest to the study were extracted from each transcribed interview. Then, from these statements, meanings were derived and considered themes. The themes were grouped into clusters and classified. Furthermore, categories and themes were highlighted using a color-coding system to facilitate analysis and formulate a description of the participants' lived experiences and recognize similarities and differences among them. The methodology utilized in this study required the researcher to constantly compare the data and the developing analysis. The analysis and interpretations were considered in light of the Saudi context (i.e., Islamic teachings and distinct social aspects of Saudi culture).

## RESULTS

In the following, we present the findings related to the responses to the three research questions underlying the study.

### Parental Perceptions of the Importance of School–Parent Partnerships

All participants highlighted the significant role played by partnerships between parents and the school in supporting children with learning disabilities and their responsibility to be involved. For example, Parent 4 stated, "There is an essential and reciprocal relationship between the home and school to support both parties. Central to this relationship is an atmosphere where the parents believe that their views are listened to, including what occurs in the parents' councils, which is essential. However, this may be more suitable in schools with ordinary learners as opposed to schools for learners with disabilities."

Parent 8 highlighted the importance of the school–parent partnership, stating that it is important to strengthen this relationship as it leads to better results in supporting the children's learning. Parent 10 added, "For children, learning happens not only in the school setting but also at home and outside the home. For this reason, the partnership between the school and the home can play a significant role in ensuring that children learn inside and outside the school."

Parent 3 referred to the importance of developing and maintaining a partnership between the school and parents for enhancing the abilities and skills of children. The same parent noted that, "It is helpful to bring the views [of parents and teachers] closer in the suitable teaching and pedagogical methods to support the student and to overcome any challenges in that."

### Parental Perceptions of the Means to Encourage Parent–School Relationships

Most parents reported receiving occasional invitations to participate in school activities, events, and functions. The parents noted that there is more than one method that a school can adopt to identify the needs of parents and to provide them with opportunities to participate. Their suggestions included (a) inviting parents to take part in celebrations, programs, and activities (13/13 parents acknowledged such invitations); (b) regularly inviting parents of students with learning disabilities to assist in monitoring and managing their children's achievement and behavior (13/13); (c) activating parent councils and holding meetings each semester periodically (12/13); (d) implementing a system of homework notes so that parents can write notes to the teachers (10/13); and (e) involving parents and accepting their constructive opinions and suggestions (13/13).

### Parental Perceptions of Challenges to Effective Parent–School Relationships

Participating parents noted several challenges related to establishing and maintaining partnerships between the school and home, including (a) parents' existing commitments (13/13); (b) the dates or times selected by the schools for meeting with parents being inconvenient for parents (8/13); (c) parent councils' focus on secondary matters that parents do not care about, which reduces their level of attendance (11/13); (d) lack of school/teacher awareness of positive impact of parent participation (9/13); and (e) disagreement between teachers and parents (8/13).

The views of many parents are represented by Parent 3's statement: "I find it surprising that schools still rely on traditional means of communication even though the world has moved on with technology and the use of faster means of communication such as WhatsApp groups and emails. However, teachers are not keen to significantly interact with these methods of communication. Maybe they are too busy as the school also has a private life and teachers are preoccupied with the requirements imposed on them."

Participating parents identified several additional challenges to developing and maintaining a successful partnership between the school and home. For example, Parent 7 said: “The main challenge I have with the school is that I am only permitted to visit on specific days and times, and teachers are often busy in meetings. Even though I may want to participate, I find that I am not entirely welcome.” Many parents (9/13) agreed with this assessment and noted that many challenges preventing partnerships led them to be dissatisfied with these partnerships. For example, Parent 5 mentioned that he is considering transferring his son to a private school from a public school because the former may be more interested in communicating, partnering, and recognizing parental participation. Most parents (11/13) agreed with Parent 11, who said: “I propose that it is essential to train teachers concerning managing partnerships with the home and how to get the buy-in of parents to the process of education and the interests of the parents and students.”

## DISCUSSION

This study explored parents’ perceptions about their involvement in their children’s education, with a focus on Saudi Arabian parents whose children attend public elementary school and have learning disabilities. Previous studies have concluded that parental participation is important for facilitating successful academic outcomes (Lynch et al., 2006). In environments in which parents perceive that they have an active role in helping their children succeed in school and that their efforts will have a positive impact, parents are more likely to become involved despite obstacles and challenges (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010).

In what follows, we discuss the results of the current study and situate our findings within the relevant literature. As noted earlier, the vast majority of the literature on parental involvement consists of research conducted with Western populations. Unless we note otherwise, very little comparable research has been conducted with Middle Eastern populations, in general, and with Saudi populations, in particular.

### Benefits of Parental Involvement in Education in General

Castro et al. (2004), Wilson-Jones (2003), and McBride et al. (2005) found that when parents are willing to participate in their children’s education and their communication with the school comes from attending parent councils and following up with teachers, their involvement in attending school events, reviewing assignments, and monitoring their children’s academic development increases. The same scholars note that greater parental school involvement increases children’s motivation and encourages them to value academic performance.

In addition, numerous studies have demonstrated that positive communication between teachers and parents improves students’ academic performance (Epstein, 2001, 2010; Leenders et al., 2019). This is based on the assumption

that for children to understand their world, their personality and needs, including behavior and challenges, should be considered. The purpose of an ongoing relationship between a child’s parents and teachers is to integrate and coordinate functions between the school and parents to achieve desired educational objectives (Epstein, 2001, 2010; Neuenchwander, 2020). A healthy parent–teacher relationship is expected to facilitate effective education, pedagogy, and well-being. Establishing trust between parents and teachers affords teachers greater opportunity to understand the child’s environment and how to interact with them most effectively. Also, establishing trust between parents and teachers ensures that the parent can understand and support the teacher’s approach. The communication process should be bidirectional, in which the teacher provides information to the parent about the child’s behavior or performance in the classroom, and the parent provides information to the teacher about the child’s interests, inclinations, personality, and schoolwork performance at home (Boit, 2020; Epstein, 2001, 2010). Communication between parents and teachers can occur through school visits, open house, phone calls, letters, and notes.

### Parental Involvement in Special Education

Some parents of children with learning disabilities worry about their children’s well-being but fail to provide them with appropriate care and support (Salem, 2014). For example, parents who are overprotective may have unreasonable expectations of the child and teachers. In addition, parental overprotection can reduce the child’s confidence, making learning more challenging. Parents’ lack of interest in communicating with teachers, lack of participation in educational activities, and unwillingness to cooperate in the ongoing review of their children is cited by Salem (2014) as among the most significant problems that impede the educational process. We next discuss implications of parental involvement for student learning and educational achievement.

### Learning and Educational Achievement

The educational achievement of children with learning disabilities is influenced by the attitudes and assistance they receive from educational institutions, teachers, specialists, and parents. Hornstra et al. (2010) noted that children with learning disabilities can be affected by parents, teachers, and fellow students with whom they interact. These interactions can either be negative or positive.

The presence of a child with learning difficulties in a family influences the attitudes of the parents and can place much stress on the parents and affect interactions between family members (Dyson, 1996). Educating parents about their child’s learning disabilities may positively affect their attitudes. Previous research has demonstrated that if counseling programs are made available to parents and other family members regarding learning disabilities, support from these other family members often increases, as demonstrated in their communication with educational institutions caring for

children with disabilities. All of these factors may help to shift parents' attitudes toward their children with learning disabilities from negative to positive, improving these children's experiences in the school, in their family, and in society, with other children and adults.

### *Parental Responsibility and Expectations*

Strong agreement was found among the parents participating in the current research that it is their responsibility to be involved in their children's education. Consistent with findings from previous studies such as Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), most parents agreed that it is their responsibility to know how their children are progressing in school. Such findings differ from previous and more dated literature reviews, such as that of Kay et al. (1994), which concluded that parents of children with learning disabilities were unsure of their responsibilities and indicated they needed more information from teachers about what was expected of them.

### *Parental Beliefs, Values, and Culture*

Parental beliefs, values, and culture can affect the success of efforts to develop and maintain partnerships between home and school (Murray et al., 2014). This view is supported by responses of participants in the current study. From the participants' responses, it is clear that they have strong opinions that shape how they participate in partnerships with the schools. They share the belief that their role in the partnership between the home and school is to support at home the learning that occurs in the classroom. Such beliefs led parents to assist their children with their homework, for example, with the expectation that this would result in positive academic outcomes for their children.

Such responses are in keeping with conclusions of previous studies, including that parental participation led to better academic achievement, attendance, and behavior (Gordon & Louis, 2012; Kinkead-Clark, 2017). Being able to assist their children at home was an essential part of how parents experienced the partnership between the home and school as positive. This also highlights strong beliefs among parents regarding their ability to have a desirable impact on the educational achievement of their children. Referred to in the home-school partnership literature as "parental self-efficacy" (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010), such beliefs constitute motivational elements in the decision by parents to be involved in the activities of their children's schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Whitaker, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995).

Based on the findings of a qualitative study, John-Akinola and Gabhainn (2014) offered suggestions for how parents can effectively participate in the activities of their children's schools. For example, the researchers recommended that schools focus on developing partnerships with parents by making it easier for them to participate in daily school activities. Numerous motivational factors may impact a parent's

decision to get involved in school or home activities related to learning (Sheldon, 2002). In addressing Research Question 2 of the current study, the aim was to investigate connections between parental perceptions regarding school communication and the degree to which parents were involved in their children's education. Participating parents indicated that if teachers attempted to invite them to participate in their children's schooling, such invitations were sometimes limited in scope.

### *Teacher and School Encouragement and Valuation of Parental Involvement*

The parents were clear about their desire for the school to offer opportunities for parents to participate in an environment they perceived as nonjudgmental. This conclusion is in keeping with prior studies focusing on what motivates parental involvement. For example, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) and Hoover-Dempsey and Whitaker (2010) concluded that parents feel inspired to be engaged and involved when they perceive that the school and teachers are genuinely interested in their involvement and input.

In the current study, the limited invitations from teachers for parents to get involved in their children's education resulted had a negative effect on parental perceptions of the role played by the school in the development and maintenance of the partnership between the home and the school. Furthermore, Saudi parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities shared the view that their ideas were not consistently considered valuable or respected, noting that the schools often did not incorporate their suggestions for how their children could be successfully instructed. This may be attributed to the fact that teachers perceive themselves as experts in providing knowledge and that parents, therefore, are the beneficiaries of that knowledge. This is a relationship parents report they have no choice but to accept if they hope to continue securing services for their children with learning disabilities (Hess et al., 2006).

Parents also shared the perception that their comparative lack of participation in their children's education was, to a certain degree, a result of poor communication with teachers. Some parents indicated that they did not participate because the teachers had not invited them to participate. This is a conclusion in line with Hess et al. (2006), who reported that families were willing to participate in educating their children with learning disabilities but did not have established, communicative relationships with teachers.

### *Parental Work and Time Constraints*

In keeping with conclusions from the literature, some parents in the current study reported that work and overall time constraints prevented them from participating in the partnership between the home and school (Baker et al., 2016). Indeed, work commitments were among the most important barriers preventing their involvement with their children's school (Murray et al., 2014). Several participants reported challenges when they attempt to obtain leave from work to



attend activities at their children's school. Their apprehension concerning failing to attend these activities brings to the fore the gap between what is said about allowing parents to participate and the practical situation concerning the partnership between the home and the school.

Beyond time and effort, parents also need to invest emotional energy to engage with teachers and the school. To that end, the results of the current study corroborate findings in the literature regarding the importance of school leaders displaying desirable attributes and attitudes (e.g., friendliness, welcoming, encouraging) that can facilitate a productive partnership between the home and school (Broomhead, 2018). The participants' responses made it clear that they appreciated welcoming gestures from the school leaders, such as greetings, sending a note of gratitude for the work they did for the school, or making time available to interact with them. Such gestures make the climate in the school warm and inviting for parents to participate. This is a finding in keeping with the conclusions of numerous scholars regarding the important role that school leadership plays in developing, supporting, and maintaining a school environment that invites parents to participate (Siegel et al., 2019).

### *Teacher Training and Perceptions about Parental Involvement*

Teachers who have received training on the importance of developing and maintaining partnerships with parents are more likely to adopt a proactive approach to establishing these relationships (Curry & Adams, 2014). Such partnerships may produce benefits for both teachers and parents. For example, teachers report higher job satisfaction when they have a healthy relationship with the parents of the children they instruct and communication is open (Binns et al., 1998). Notwithstanding this observation, teacher preparation programs addressing partnerships with parents are usually restricted to courses in special education or early childhood education (Murray & Mereoiu, 2016). Not surprising, when asked to identify barriers that hinder teacher–family involvement, teachers often identify a lack of teacher preparation (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). That is, even though teachers are conscious of the important role of parental involvement, they often do not receive sufficient training in their preservice programs or continuing professional development for partnering with parents in a meaningful manner (Hiatt-Michael, 2006).

However, to create effective partnerships with parents, teachers need more than skills and knowledge. They also need to develop and maintain an openness to parental input (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). According to Ratcliff and Hunt (2009), approaches to family participation must be diverse, wide-ranging, and amalgamated across teacher preparation programs as a single instructional method may not be sufficient to prepare teachers to work effectively with parents. Such training should also include opportunities for interactive experiences between parents and teacher candidates.

As in previous studies (e.g., Crozier & Davies, 2007), parents in the current research reported a willingness to increase their communication with their child's teachers. In particu-

lar, participants expressed a positive outlook when there is authentic two-way communication, where they have an opportunity to provide information instead of just receiving it, and perceived any communication opportunity as empowering (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Such two-way communication must be based on mutual understanding and respect. Along those lines, Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that parents must be shown by teachers and by school leaders that they are important, for example, by ensuring that they are treated as a central part of the learning process, with schools providing support to those who wish to be involved.

We suggest that schools actively investigate ways to establish a sense of belonging for parents through developing positive relationships based on respect and understanding of parents' experiences and agency (see John-Akinola & Gabhainn, 2014). Sime and Sheridan (2014) concluded that positive relationships between the school and parents provide cultural capital because they afford parents access to knowledge; however, McKenna and Millen (2013) found that even when parents felt included and welcome, they still felt as if they were on the outside of the educational experiences of their children. Thus, while a sense of belonging is required to facilitate engagement by parents, it may not always be sufficient unless schools and teachers communicate that they trust and appreciate parents' ability to share responsibility for their children's learning.

### **Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations**

No approach to parental engagement is suitable for every context (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Schools must be flexible when collaborating with parents. The barriers experienced when practitioners attempt to adopt family-centered practices have been identified in several previous studies. Chief among them are inefficiencies in training models made available to professionals, a lack of evidence-based research on the attitudes of professionals, and a dearth of awareness regarding the effectiveness of various approaches (Wade et al., 2007). Even though research supports implementing a family-centered model when teaching and caring for learners with disabilities, negative and noncollaborative relationships between professionals and parents sometimes exist (Dunst et al., 2007).

Based on the example set by Lumby (2007), who acknowledged that in academic research the voices of parents are often obscured by the expectations and doubts of researchers, policymakers, and professionals, the literature review for the current study focused specifically on research that included the directly transcribed responses of parents. This, in turn, formed the basis of the study's analysis in an effort to respect and appreciate parental perceptions as essential instead of treating them as just one among many alternative perspectives (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). McKenna and Millen (2013) present parental presence and voice models, highlighting the role played by acknowledging, sharing, and respecting parental perceptions.

Parents of children with learning disabilities are under increased stress and need strategies that can assist them in coping and adapting to the requirements of daily life (e.g., Park

et al., 2002). As parents of children with learning disabilities become overwhelmed with meeting the needs of their children, they may lack the time or energy required to participate in the child's academic activities. Although the scope of the current study did not include consideration of the social networks of parents of learners with disabilities, future studies may address these issues. Studies involving parents' social networks may assist in improving opportunities for parental support to meet the demands of having a child with a learning disability.

The scale and size of a study can impose limitations on the extent to which findings may be generalized to a broader population (Lichtman, 2010). With regard to the current study, this challenge could be mitigated by using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to identify how collaborative learning partnerships influence students' learning outcomes. Specifically, a study assessing a wider population within and outside the Middle East may assist in evaluating the effect of improved operational processes on the partnerships between the home and school on students' learning outcomes, bringing to the fore insights into whether such processes helped resolve tensions between teachers and parents. Future studies also may attempt to answer questions linked to the models of partnerships that schools could use to improve outcomes. For example, such studies also might investigate how partnerships impact student learning outcomes over the long term and whether schools and teachers are cognizant of the value of parental perceptions of their children's learning styles. Finally, future research could profitably explore whether the school's efforts to support such partnerships is sustainable and equitable over the long term for both teachers and parents.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Deanship of Scientific Research (DSR) at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, funded this project, under grant no. KEP-97-120-42.

## RESEARCH REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Research Ethics Committee at King Abdulaziz University, protocol KEP-97-120-42, date of approval: 15/02/2021.

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Received: 2020.05.01  
Accepted: 2020.06.30  
Available online: 2020.07.15  
Published: 2020.09.12

# The Effects of Online Homeschooling on Children, Parents, and Teachers of Grades 1–9 During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Authors' Contribution:

Study Design A  
Data Collection B  
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**Source of support:** Departmental sources

**Background:** Beginning in the 2020 spring semester, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all school-age children in China were homeschooled via live/recorded broadcasts, online group communication, and software-based homework submission. This study assessed the effects of and proper preparation for this educational approach.

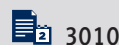
**Material/Methods:** The homeschooling behaviors and feelings of school-age children were assessed with 2010 online surveys obtained separately from students, parents, and teachers of grades 1–9 in 15 Chinese provinces. Answers were compared among low- (grades 1–3), middle- (grades 4–6), and high- (grades 7–9) grade groups. The chi-square test was used to identify significant differences between groups.

**Results:** We found that 76% of the respondents thought the homeschooling style was acceptable. However, teachers were concerned that students' interest, focus, and academic performance would decline. Sixty-nine percent of the parents reported their children had more than 3 hours of daily screen time, and 82% of students had less than 2 hours of daily outdoor activity. Ninety-five percent of the parents were concerned about their children's eyesight. Additionally, 17.6% of the students were suspected to have emotional or behavioral problems according to the parent-rated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) results. The Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS) results of parents and teachers showed higher levels of anxiety than usual.

**Conclusions:** Students should continue the going-to-school rhythm at home to cope with changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Integrated grade-specific approaches are needed. Because long screen time and insufficient outdoor activities can severely affect children's eyesight, appropriate eye-protection measures should be implemented.

**MeSH Keywords:** **Computer Communication Networks • COVID-19 • Quarantine • Schools**

**Full-text PDF:** <https://www.medscimonit.com/abstract/index/idArt/925591>



## Background

Home confinement was implemented nationwide in China in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Consequently, all school-age children received homeschooling from the beginning of the 2020 spring semester [1]. Although children were considered to be less affected by the virus than adults, as revealed by clinical experience, they were not exempt from infection but merely showed less severe symptoms [2]. Given the length of the home confinement period, homeschooling was considered both necessary and effective under the circumstances [3].

Unlike the conventional homeschooling style applied in other countries, where parents, relatives, or other knowledgeable persons act as instructors and conduct basic education at home [4], the Chinese homeschooling style is a combination of live/recorded broadcasts, WeChat/DingTalk group communication, and software-based homework submission [5]. All school subjects are taught online, including the major subjects of language, science, and math and the minor subjects of morality, music, art, and gym. As this style has never been used before, and thus no previous experience can be referenced, the present study assessed the effects of and proper preparation for this educational approach.

According to the Ministry of Education, approximately 180 million primary and secondary students were being homeschooled in China. Concerns were raised regarding their mental and physical health, as well as academic performance [6,7]. To understand the possible influence, both direct and indirect, of this homeschooling style on their academic performance, we conducted a survey of primary and secondary school students enrolled in homeschooling, as well as their parents and teachers.

## Material and Methods

### Sample

Students enrolled in homeschooling and parents and teachers of grades 1–9 were selected for this survey. Excluding unwilling participants, responses with repeated data, and questionnaires with multiple unanswered items, a total of 2010 valid questionnaires were collected, with 738 answered by students, 1062 answered by parents (or similar guardians), and 210 answered by teachers.

### Measures

By means of online questionnaires developed on the “Wenjuanxing” website and submitted via cell phone, learning- and adaptation-related questions (mainly single-choice

and a few fill-in-the-blank questions) were delivered separately to the students, parents, and teachers to assess homeschooling-related behaviors, feelings, and somatic effects [8]. The questions were answered as “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree”, and the choice “do not know” was included in some of the questions for parents and teachers. The survey lasted for 7 days in the second week (7 to 13 March 2020) of the homeschooling semester.

### Demographics

Basic demographic information, including age and gender of the surveyed students, parents, and teachers, was collected as part of the survey. The relationship of the respondent with the homeschooled child and the child’s gender and age were also included in the parents’ survey.

### Survey of students

Questions regarding interest in learning, interaction in class, feelings, physical discomfort, screen time, outdoor activity time, sleeping time, and schooling style preference were included in the survey of students. The target population was students in grades 1–9 who were currently taking online classes.

### Survey of parents

Parents were asked the same questions regarding one of their homeschooled children in grades 1–9 to provide a different angle from the parents’ perspectives. Additional questions on class monitoring and children’s eyesight were included. Moreover, the parent-rated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to assess the emotional symptoms, conduct problems, peer relationships, and other psychological characteristics of the children [9]. Previous studies in China have proven the good psychometric properties of the SDQ [10]. A cutoff score of 17 (standard score) was used to indicate an abnormal range, referring to previous studies of Chinese children [11]. The Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS) was used to assess the anxiety levels of parents, with a cutoff score of 50 (standard scores  $\geq 50$  indicate anxiety) [12]. The SDQ and SAS questions were set to be skippable so that parents could decide whether to participate.

### Survey of teachers

The questions addressed to teachers were counterparts of those presented to students as a reflection of students’ behaviors and feelings. Teachers were also asked about their anticipation of students’ academic performance based on their experience of teaching online classes. Additionally, the SAS was also addressed to teachers and set to be skippable.



## Statistical analysis

The answers collected from students, parents, and teachers were compared in the low- (grades 1–3), middle- (grades 4–6), and high- (grades 7–9) grade groups. To simplify the analysis, “strongly agree” and “agree” were both counted as “agree”, while “disagree” and “strongly disagree” were both counted as “disagree”. In the few cases when the answer was “do not know”, it was also counted as “disagree”. The chi-square test was used to identify statistically significant differences between groups. SPSS (Release 24, IBM SPSS Statistics) for Windows was used for data analyses, and  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant.

## Results

### Demographics

A total of 2010 valid questionnaires were collected from 15 provinces in China. The students' questionnaires were completed by children with an average age of 11 years, while the parents who completed questionnaires had children with an average age of 10 years. The gender ratio of the students/children was generally even. Sixty-five percent of the parents' questionnaires were answered by mothers and 61.1% of the parents were 31–40 years old. We found that 63.3% of the families reported having 1 child taking online classes. The teachers' questionnaires were completed by teachers teaching online classes – 76.2% were female, 88.1% were under 50 years old, and the teachers sampled were distributed evenly among grades (Table 1).

### Student results

According to the students' questionnaires, 55.6% of the students were interested in this homeschooling style, but only 37.7% of them could interact actively with teachers and classmates during online classes. Among students, 93.2% reported not being distracted (playing games or chatting with friends) during online classes, and the percentages increased as the grades increased (89.2%, 94%, and 96.4% for the low-, middle-, and high-grade groups, respectively). Among students, 74.4% reported no fatigue/sleepiness, while 84.6% reported having no back pain. However, the percentages of the high-grade group (63.1% for no fatigue/sleepiness and 72.6% for no back pain) were considerably lower than the averages. Among students, 66.7% reported having less than 1 hour of screen time per day, while 13% reported more than 3 hours. Among students, 82% reported having less than 2 hours of outdoor activity per day. Notably, 42.9% of the high-grade group students reported no outdoor activity time at all, while 39.2% and 40.1% of the low- and middle-grade groups, respectively, reported 1–2 hours per

day. Regarding daily sleeping time, 56.3% and 55.2% of the low- and middle-grade groups, respectively, reported 9–10 hours, while 53.6% of the high-grade group reported 7–8 hours. We found that 83.5% of the students preferred classroom-based schooling to homeschooling and other schooling styles (Table 2).

### Parent results

We found 41.9% of the surveyed parents believed their children were interested in the homeschooling style. However, 57.4% of them considered that there was not enough interaction during online classes. Among parents, 77.4% considered that their children focused on learning during online classes, and the percentage increased as the grades increased (73.4%, 80.3%, and 81.6% for low, middle, and high grades, respectively). Nevertheless, 50% of them believed that monitoring was required during online classes, with the percentage decreasing as the grades increased (60.9%, 43.1%, and 33.3% for low, middle, and high grades, respectively). Up to 57.2% of the parents reported no fatigue/sleepiness in their children, while 73.3% reported no back pain, but the percentages of the high-grade group (34.5% for no fatigue/sleepiness and 55.2% for no back pain) were considerably lower than the averages. We found that 68.8% of the parents reported that their children had more than 3 hours of screen time per day, which exceeded the recommendation ( $\leq 2$  hours a day) of the American Academy of Pediatrics [13,14]. Among parents, 43.7% reported no outdoor activity for their children, especially for the high-grade group (60.9%). In particular, parents of students in all grades expressed concern about their children's eyesight (94.8%, 94%, and 97.7% for low, middle, and high grades, respectively). Regarding their children's sleeping time, 62.1% of the high-grade group parents reported 7–8 hours, while 59.2% and 59.4% of the low- and middle-grade group parents, respectively, reported 9–10 hours. We found that 95.6% of the parents preferred classroom-based schooling to other schooling styles (Table 3).

### Teacher results

Among teachers, 35.2% considered that this homeschooling style would increase their students' interest in learning, but the percentage decreased quickly as the grades increased (41.5%, 40%, and 16.7% for low, middle, and high grades, respectively). Conversely, 25.7% of the teachers considered that this style would decrease their students' interest, and the percentage increased quickly as the grades increased (18.3%, 26.3%, and 37.5% for low, middle, and high grades, respectively). We found that 74.3% of the teachers felt they could interact with their students during online classes, although the percentage decreased as the grades increased (80.5%, 76.3%, and 60.4% for low, middle, and high grades, respectively). However, 41.9% believed that their students were truly focused in class. Only 8.6% reported that they could effectively monitor their

**Table 1.** Characteristics of students, parents and teachers.

| Variables                                           | Grades 1–3 | Grades 4–6 | Grades 7–9 | Total sample |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>Students</b>                                     |            |            |            |              |
| Number                                              | 158 (21)   | 496 (67)   | 84 (12)    | 738 (100)    |
| Age, mean (sd)                                      | 8.8 (1.1)  | 11.3 (0.9) | 12.9 (0.8) | 11.0 (1.7)   |
| Gender, n (%)                                       |            |            |            |              |
| Male                                                | 95 (60)    | 245 (49)   | 40 (48)    | 380 (51)     |
| Female                                              | 63 (40)    | 251 (51)   | 44 (52)    | 358 (49)     |
| <b>Parents</b>                                      |            |            |            |              |
| Number                                              | 458 (43)   | 517 (49)   | 87 (8)     | 1062 (100)   |
| Age, mean (sd)                                      | 8.1 (1.2)  | 11.1 (0.9) | 13.1 (0.9) | 10.0 (2.0)   |
| Gender, n (%)                                       |            |            |            |              |
| Male                                                | 230 (50)   | 293 (57)   | 49 (56)    | 572 (54)     |
| Female                                              | 228 (50)   | 224 (43)   | 38 (44)    | 294 (46)     |
| <b>Responder</b>                                    |            |            |            |              |
| Mother                                              | 127 (27.7) | 170 (32.9) | 26 (29.9)  | 323 (30.4)   |
| Father                                              | 315 (68.8) | 317 (61.3) | 58 (66.7)  | 690 (65)     |
| Others                                              | 16 (3.5)   | 30 (5.8)   | 3 (3.4)    | 49 (4.6)     |
| <b>Age of responder</b>                             |            |            |            |              |
| ≤30                                                 | 65 (14.2)  | 28 (5.4)   | 3 (3.4)    | 96 (9)       |
| 31–40                                               | 306 (66.8) | 301 (58.2) | 42 (48.3)  | 649 (61.1)   |
| 41–50                                               | 76 (16.6)  | 166 (32.1) | 38 (43.7)  | 280 (26.4)   |
| >50                                                 | 11 (2.4)   | 22 (4.3)   | 4 (4.6)    | 37 (3.5)     |
| <b>Number of children enrolled in homeschooling</b> |            |            |            |              |
| 1                                                   | 298 (65.1) | 320 (61.9) | 54 (62.1)  | 672 (63.3)   |
| 2                                                   | 136 (29.7) | 180 (34.8) | 28 (32.2)  | 344 (32.4)   |
| ≥3                                                  | 24 (5.3)   | 17 (3.3)   | 5 (5.7)    | 45 (4.4)     |
| <b>Teachers</b>                                     |            |            |            |              |
| Number                                              | 82 (39)    | 80 (38)    | 48 (22)    | 210 (100)    |
| Age, n (%)                                          |            |            |            |              |
| ≤30                                                 | 44 (53.7)  | 32 (40)    | 8 (16.7)   | 84 (40)      |
| 31–40                                               | 17 (20.7)  | 19 (23.8)  | 11 (22.9)  | 47 (22.4)    |
| 41–50                                               | 14 (17.1)  | 23 (28.8)  | 17 (35.4)  | 54 (25.7)    |
| >50                                                 | 7 (8.5)    | 6 (7.5)    | 12 (25)    | 25 (11.9)    |
| <b>Gender, n (%)</b>                                |            |            |            |              |
| Male                                                | 14 (17.1)  | 21 (26.3)  | 15 (31.3)  | 50 (23.8)    |
| Female                                              | 68 (82.9)  | 59 (73.8)  | 33 (68.8)  | 160 (76.2)   |

**Table 2.** Homeschooling behaviors and feelings of students.

| Variables                                                            | Grades 1–3<br>158 (21%) | Grades 4–6<br>496 (67%) | Grades 7–9<br>84 (12%) | Total sample<br>738 (100%) | p-Value |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| Are you interested in this homeschooling style?                      |                         |                         |                        |                            | 0.975   |
| Agree                                                                | 87 (55.1)               | 279 (56.3)              | 44 (52.4)              | 410 (55.6)                 |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                           | 44 (27.8)               | 133 (26.8)              | 25 (29.8)              | 202 (27.4)                 |         |
| Disagree                                                             | 27 (17.1)               | 84 (16.9)               | 15 (17.9)              | 126 (17.1)                 |         |
| Can you interact with teachers and classmates during online classes? |                         |                         |                        |                            | 0.112   |
| Agree                                                                | 57 (36.1)               | 200 (40.3)              | 21 (25)                | 278 (37.7)                 |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                           | 35 (22.2)               | 107 (21.6)              | 22 (26.2)              | 164 (22.2)                 |         |
| Disagree                                                             | 66 (41.8)               | 189 (38.1)              | 41 (48.8)              | 296 (40.1)                 |         |
| Do you play games or chat with friends during online classes?        |                         |                         |                        |                            | 0.009*  |
| Agree                                                                | 9 (5.7)                 | 10 (2)                  | 1 (1.2)                | 20 (2.7)                   |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                           | 8 (5.1)                 | 20 (4)                  | 2 (2.4)                | 30 (4.1)                   |         |
| Disagree                                                             | 141 (89.2)              | 466 (94)                | 81 (96.4)              | 688 (93.2)                 |         |
| Do you feel fatigue/sleepiness during the online classes?            |                         |                         |                        |                            | 0.071   |
| Agree                                                                | 18 (11.4)               | 38 (7.7)                | 10 (11.9)              | 66 (8.9)                   |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                           | 25 (15.8)               | 77 (15.5)               | 21 (25.0)              | 123 (16.7)                 |         |
| Disagree                                                             | 115 (72.8)              | 381 (76.8)              | 53 (63.1)              | 549 (74.4)                 |         |
| Do you feel back pains during online classes?                        |                         |                         |                        |                            | 0.031*  |
| Agree                                                                | 8 (5.1)                 | 22 (4.4)                | 7 (8.3)                | 37 (5)                     |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                           | 12 (7.6)                | 47 (9.5)                | 16 (19.0)              | 75 (10.2)                  |         |
| Disagree                                                             | 138 (87.3)              | 427 (86.1)              | 61 (72.6)              | 626 (84.6)                 |         |
| How long is your screen time every day?                              |                         |                         |                        |                            | 0.189   |
| <1 hours                                                             | 105 (66.5)              | 322 (64.9)              | 65 (77.4)              | 492 (66.7)                 |         |
| 1–3 hours                                                            | 29 (18.4)               | 109 (22)                | 12 (14.3)              | 150 (20.3)                 |         |
| ≥3 hours                                                             | 24 (15.2)               | 65 (13.1)               | 7 (8.3)                | 96 (13)                    |         |
| How long is the outdoor activity time every day?                     |                         |                         |                        |                            | <0.001* |
| None                                                                 | 38 (24.1)               | 118 (23.8)              | 36 (42.9)              | 192 (26)                   |         |
| <1 hours                                                             | 19 (12)                 | 94 (19)                 | 20 (23.8)              | 133 (18)                   |         |
| 1–2 hours                                                            | 62 (39.2)               | 199 (40.1)              | 19 (22.6)              | 280 (37.9)                 |         |
| ≥2 hours                                                             | 39 (24.7)               | 85 (17.1)               | 9 (10.7)               | 133 (18)                   |         |
| How long is your sleeping time every day?                            |                         |                         |                        |                            | 0.013*  |
| <7 hours                                                             | 15 (9.5)                | 33 (6.7)                | 6 (7.1)                | 54 (7.1)                   |         |
| 7–8 hours                                                            | 38 (24.1)               | 136 (27.4)              | 45 (53.6)              | 219 (29.7)                 |         |
| 9–10 hours                                                           | 89 (56.3)               | 274 (55.2)              | 31 (36.9)              | 394 (53.4)                 |         |
| >10 hours                                                            | 16 (10.1)               | 53 (10.7)               | 2 (2.4)                | 71 (9.6)                   |         |
| Which schooling style do you prefer?                                 |                         |                         |                        |                            | 0.501   |
| Homeschooling with online classes                                    | 15 (9.5)                | 65 (13.1)               | 11 (13.1)              | 91 (12.3)                  |         |
| Classroom based schooling                                            | 138 (87.3)              | 405 (81.7)              | 71 (84.5)              | 614 (83.5)                 |         |
| Study at home by yourself                                            | 2 (1.3)                 | 14 (2.8)                | 0 (0.0)                | 16 (2.2)                   |         |
| Others                                                               | 3 (1.9)                 | 12 (2.4)                | 2 (2.4)                | 17 (2.3)                   |         |

**Table 3.** Homeschooling behaviors and feelings of Barents.

| Variables                                                                                | Grades 1–3<br>458 (43%) | Grades 4–6<br>517 (49%) | Grades 7–9<br>87 (8%) | Total sample<br>1062 (100%) | p-Value |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
| Do you think your child is interested in this homeschooling style?                       |                         |                         |                       |                             | 0.779   |
| Agree                                                                                    | 183 (40)                | 226 (43.7)              | 36 (41.4)             | 445 (41.9)                  |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                                               | 140 (30.6)              | 143 (27.7)              | 24 (27.6)             | 307 (28.9)                  |         |
| Disagree                                                                                 | 135 (29.5)              | 148 (28.6)              | 27 (31)               | 310 (29.2)                  |         |
| Do you think your child can interact with teachers and classmates during online classes? |                         |                         |                       |                             | 0.305   |
| Agree                                                                                    | 105 (22.9)              | 114 (22.1)              | 18 (20.7)             | 237 (22.3)                  |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                                               | 91 (19.9)               | 113 (21.9)              | 11 (12.6)             | 215 (20.2)                  |         |
| Disagree                                                                                 | 262 (57.2)              | 290 (56.1)              | 58 (66.7)             | 610 (57.4)                  |         |
| Do you think your child can focus on learning during online classes?                     |                         |                         |                       |                             | 0.014*  |
| Agree                                                                                    | 336 (73.4)              | 415 (80.3)              | 71 (81.6)             | 822 (77.4)                  |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                                               | 85 (18.6)               | 76 (14.7)               | 10 (11.5)             | 171 (16.1)                  |         |
| Disagree                                                                                 | 37 (8.1)                | 26 (5)                  | 6 (6.9)               | 69 (6.5)                    |         |
| Do you think your child requires monitoring when taking the online classes?              |                         |                         |                       |                             | <0.001* |
| Agree                                                                                    | 279 (60.9)              | 223 (43.1)              | 29 (33.3)             | 531 (50)                    |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                                               | 115 (25.1)              | 162 (31.3)              | 29 (33.3)             | 306 (28.8)                  |         |
| Disagree                                                                                 | 64 (14)                 | 132 (25.5)              | 29 (33.3)             | 225 (21.2)                  |         |
| Do you think your child feels fatigue/sleepiness during the online classes?              |                         |                         |                       |                             | <0.001  |
| Agree                                                                                    | 71 (15.5)               | 63 (12.2)               | 19 (21.8)             | 153 (14.4)                  |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                                               | 130 (28.4)              | 134 (25.9)              | 38 (43.7)             | 302 (28.4)                  |         |
| Disagree                                                                                 | 257 (56.1)              | 320 (61.9)              | 30 (34.5)             | 607 (57.2)                  |         |
| Do you think your child feels back pains during online classes?                          |                         |                         |                       |                             | 0.002*  |
| Agree                                                                                    | 25 (5.5)                | 30 (5.8)                | 12 (13.8)             | 67 (6.3)                    |         |
| Neither agree nor disagree                                                               | 87 (19)                 | 103 (19.9)              | 27 (31)               | 217 (20.4)                  |         |
| Disagree                                                                                 | 346 (75.5)              | 384 (74.3)              | 48 (55.2)             | 778 (73.3)                  |         |
| How long is your child's screen time every day?                                          |                         |                         |                       |                             | 0.052   |
| <1 hours                                                                                 | 77 (16.8)               | 73 (14.1)               | 13 (14.9)             | 163 (15.3)                  |         |
| 1–3 hours                                                                                | 79 (17.2)               | 84 (16.2)               | 5 (5.7)               | 168 (15.8)                  |         |
| ≥3 hours                                                                                 | 302 (65.9)              | 360 (69.6)              | 69 (79.3)             | 731 (68.8)                  |         |
| How long is you child's outdoor activity time every day?                                 |                         |                         |                       |                             | 0.001*  |
| None                                                                                     | 179 (39.1)              | 232 (44.9)              | 53 (60.9)             | 464 (43.7)                  |         |
| <1 hours                                                                                 | 105 (22.9)              | 86 (16.6)               | 16 (18.4)             | 207 (19.5)                  |         |
| 1–2 hours                                                                                | 88 (19.2)               | 124 (24)                | 13 (14.9)             | 225 (21.2)                  |         |
| ≥2 hours                                                                                 | 86 (18.8)               | 75 (14.5)               | 5 (5.7)               | 166 (15.6)                  |         |



**Table 3 continued.** Homeschooling behaviors and feelings of Barents.

| Variables                                                            | Grades 1–3<br>458 (43%) | Grades 4–6<br>517 (49%) | Grades 7–9<br>87 (8%) | Total sample<br>1062 (100%) | p-Value |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
| How long is your child's sleeping time every day                     |                         |                         |                       |                             | <0.001* |
| <7 hours                                                             | 13 (2.8)                | 14 (2.7)                | 8 (9.2)               | 35 (3.3)                    |         |
| 7–8 hours                                                            | 151 (33)                | 173 (33.5)              | 54 (62.1)             | 378 (35.6)                  |         |
| 9–10 hours                                                           | 271 (59.2)              | 307 (59.4)              | 21 (24.1)             | 599 (56.4)                  |         |
| >10 hours                                                            | 23 (5)                  | 23 (4.4)                | 4 (4.6)               | 50 (4.7)                    |         |
| Are you concerned about your child's eyesight taking online classes? |                         |                         |                       |                             | 0.362   |
| Yes                                                                  | 434 (94.8)              | 486 (94)                | 85 (97.7)             | 1005 (94.6)                 |         |
| No                                                                   | 24 (5.2)                | 31 (6)                  | 2 (2.3)               | 57 (5.4)                    |         |
| Which schooling style do you prefer?                                 |                         |                         |                       |                             | 0.308   |
| Homeschooling with online classes                                    | 3 (0.7)                 | 12 (2.3)                | 3 (3.4)               | 18 (1.7)                    |         |
| Classroom based schooling                                            | 443 (96.7)              | 491 (95)                | 81 (93.1)             | 1015 (95.6)                 |         |
| Study at home by themselves                                          | 9 (2)                   | 11 (2.1)                | 3 (3.4)               | 23 (2.2)                    |         |
| Others                                                               | 3 (0.7)                 | 3 (0.6)                 | 0 (0)                 | 6 (0.6)                     |         |

students during online classes, with the percentage decreasing from 13.4% to 0% as the grades increased. Meanwhile, 52.9% of them considered that homeschooling would have a negative influence on their students' academic performance. Like the students and the parents, 83.8% of the teachers preferred classroom-based schooling to other styles (Table 4).

### SDQ and SAS scores of parents and teachers

The results of the parent-rated SDQ indicated that 17.6% of the students were suspected to have emotional or behavioral problems, and low-grade students were considered more vulnerable than high-grade students (19.3%, 16.7%, and 13.7% for low, middle, and high grades, respectively). Merely 9.6% of the surveyed parents and 17.2% of the surveyed teachers showed elevated levels of anxiety, as indicated in the SAS results. More parents and teachers reported anxiety in the low- and middle-grade groups than in the high-grade group (10.8%, 8.9%, and 6.3% in parents and 18.5%, 20.8%, and 9.4% in teachers for low, middle, and high grades, respectively) (Table 5).

## Discussion

The survey results indicated that most of the students, parents, and teachers thought the homeschooling style was acceptable, at least in the beginning. Positive attitudes are believed to have a positive influence on students' academic

performance [15]. Nevertheless, it is notable that 25.7% of the teachers expressed concern that this style could diminish their students' interest in learning; the higher the grade, the more teachers were concerned.

It is commonly agreed that students' interest in learning is one of the most important factors influencing their academic performance. To preserve and improve students' interest in learning during this homeschooling period, it is suggested that the aspect of "teaching" be weakened and the aspect of "learning" be strengthened [16]. Information can be discovered and summarized by students themselves through explorative reading and research assignments. It is even better if the assignments are designed to be associated with real life to make full use of the home environment [17]. Instead of live/recorded broadcasts, multimedia methods (e.g., demonstrative experiments, animated videos, didactic games) can be applied. As the home environment is not dedicated to long-term learning, it is also important to minimize the number of learning tasks. Some subjects (e.g., music and gym) that are not suitable for online learning can be learned in the form of appreciation and family activities to reduce the amount of online time [18].

Interaction is an indicator of class participation. Good interaction in class can increase students' comprehension and application of knowledge and promote the learning effect [19]. Although 74.3% of the teachers considered that they could interact with students during online classes, 66.3% of the

**Table 4.** Homeschooling behaviors and feelings of teachers.

| Variables                                                                           | Grades 1–3<br>82 (39%) | Grades 4–6<br>80 (38%) | Grades 7–9<br>48 (22%) | Total sample<br>210 (100%) | p-Value |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| Do you think that homeschooling will influence your students' interest in learning? |                        |                        |                        |                            | 0.003*  |
| Increased                                                                           | 34 (41.5)              | 32 (40)                | 8 (16.7)               | 74 (35.2)                  |         |
| Same as usual                                                                       | 33 (40.2)              | 27 (33.8)              | 22 (45.8)              | 82 (39.0)                  |         |
| Decreased                                                                           | 15 (18.3)              | 21 (26.3)              | 18 (37.5)              | 54 (25.7)                  |         |
| Is there interaction between you and your students in your online classes?          |                        |                        |                        |                            | 0.007*  |
| Yes, frequently/often                                                               | 66 (80.5)              | 61 (76.3)              | 29 (60.4)              | 156 (74.3)                 |         |
| Yes, sometimes                                                                      | 10 (12.2)              | 12 (15.0)              | 8 (16.7)               | 30 (14.3)                  |         |
| No                                                                                  | 6 (7.3)                | 7 (8.8)                | 11 (22.9)              | 24 (11.4)                  |         |
| Do you think your students are focused in your online classes?                      |                        |                        |                        |                            | 0.533   |
| Very focused                                                                        | 34 (41.5)              | 38 (47.5)              | 16 (33.3)              | 88 (41.9)                  |         |
| Sometimes                                                                           | 38 (46.3)              | 31 (38.8)              | 23 (47.9)              | 92 (43.8)                  |         |
| No                                                                                  | 10 (12.2)              | 11 (13.8)              | 9 (18.8)               | 30 (14.3)                  |         |
| Can you monitor your students effectively during online classes?                    |                        |                        |                        |                            | 0.006*  |
| Effectively                                                                         | 11 (13.4)              | 7 (8.8)                | 0 (0)                  | 18 (8.6)                   |         |
| Sometimes                                                                           | 45 (54.9)              | 45 (56.3)              | 24 (50)                | 114 (54.3)                 |         |
| No                                                                                  | 26 (31.7)              | 28 (35)                | 24 (50)                | 78 (37.1)                  |         |
| How do you anticipate the influence on your students' academic performance?         |                        |                        |                        |                            | 0.025*  |
| Improve                                                                             | 17 (20.7)              | 17 (21.3)              | 6 (12.5)               | 40 (19)                    |         |
| Same as usual                                                                       | 30 (36.6)              | 19 (23.8)              | 10 (20.8)              | 59 (28.1)                  |         |
| Decline                                                                             | 35 (42.7)              | 44 (55)                | 32 (66.7)              | 111 (52.9)                 |         |
| Which schooling style do you prefer?                                                |                        |                        |                        |                            | 0.267   |
| Homeschooling with online classes                                                   | 10 (12.2)              | 6 (7.5)                | 2 (4.2)                | 18 (8.6)                   |         |
| Classroom based schooling                                                           | 67 (81.7)              | 65 (81.3)              | 44 (91.7)              | 176 (83.8)                 |         |
| Study at home by themselves with teachers' instructions                             | 4 (4.9)                | 5 (6.3)                | 0 (0)                  | 9 (4.3)                    |         |
| Others                                                                              | 1 (1.2)                | 4 (5)                  | 2 (4.2)                | 7 (3.3)                    |         |

students and 57.4% of the parents did not agree. This contrast probably indicates that teachers can pay attention to a small portion of the students during online classes, while the majority of students were neglected because they were not proactive.

To actively engage students in class interaction, parents can do more than providing the proper equipment. It is a good idea for parents to join their children as partners in online classes so that the students can interact not only with teachers and classmates but also with parents. Parents can note their children's shortcomings and provide feedback to teachers so that

the teaching effect can be evaluated, with necessary adjustments made, and even individual tutoring assigned.

We found that 93.2% of the students reported that they were not distracted (not playing or chatting) during online classes, and 77.4% of the parents believed the same, but only 41.9% of the teachers agreed. Similarly, 50% of the parents considered that their children required monitoring in class, but 37.1% of the teachers thought they could not monitor their students at all. As a result, 52.9% of the teachers anticipated that their students' academic performance would be adversely affected

**Table 5.** Results of parent-rated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)\* and Self-rating Anxiety Scale (SAS) of parents\*\* and teachers\*\*\*.

| Variables       | Grades 1–3 | Grades 4–6 | Grades 7–9 | Total sample | p-Value |
|-----------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------|
| SDQ             |            |            |            |              | 0.5     |
| Normal          | 255 (80.7) | 310 (83.3) | 44 (86.3)  | 609 (82.4)   |         |
| Abnormal        | 61 (19.3)  | 62 (16.7)  | 7 (13.7)   | 130 (17.6)   |         |
| SAS of parents  |            |            |            |              | 0.537   |
| Normal          | 265 (89.2) | 265 (91.1) | 45 (93.8)  | 575 (90.4)   |         |
| Abnormal        | 32 (10.8)  | 26 (8.9)   | 3 (6.3)    | 61 (9.6)     |         |
| SAS of teachers |            |            |            |              | 0.389   |
| Normal          | 44 (81.5)  | 38 (79.2)  | 29 (90.6)  | 111 (82.8)   |         |
| Abnormal        | 10 (18.5)  | 10 (20.8)  | 3 (9.4)    | 23 (17.2)    |         |

\* 739 parent-rated SDQ were collected, 55.1% with boys and 44.9% with girls; \*\* 636 parents' SAS were collected, 30.7% fathers, 64.0% mothers and 4.7% other relatives; \*\*\* 134 teachers' SAS were collected, 22.4% males and 77.6% females.

by this homeschooling style; the higher the grade, the more teachers expressed this negative anticipation.

There are several ways that parents can help students be more focused in class. Instead of telling the children to study hard, parents can set them an example by working hard at home and participating in classes with their children. The going-to-school rhythm can be continued at home by means such as setting up a study room that is similar to the classroom, having the students dressed in school uniforms before classes, and entering the study room as if entering the classroom. For teachers to effectively monitor students in class, online conferences/virtual classroom software can be used as supplements to the live/recorded broadcasts. With the camera on, teachers and students can see each other as they do in the classroom [20].

We found that 68.8% of the parents reported 3 hours and more of daily screen time for their children, but 82% of the students and 84.4% of the parents reported less than 2 hours of outdoor time. In addition, 94.6% of the parents were concerned about their children's eyesight [21]. Furthermore, although 74.4% of the students reported no fatigue/sleepiness and 84.6% reported no back pain, a clear difference in percentages between the low-/middle- and high-grade groups was reported by both students and parents.

In the present study, eye distance was less than 1 foot when studying, and sleep time of less than 7 hours is a risk factor for myopia [22]. Therefore, it is crucial to reduce students' screen time to mitigate the negative direct and indirect influences, even though they are being homeschooled [23]. One way to achieve this is to have as few classes a day as possible (as discussed before), and homework can be done in the traditional handwritten way instead of on computers and cellphones [18].

Children should be kept away from TVs and video games after class and be engaged in outdoor exercise (in the garden or even on the balcony) for at least 2 hours a day [24,25]. Correct posture during study and adequate sleeping time for school students should be assured. For after-class time, parents can help students develop hobbies at home, such as cooking, baking, drawing, gardening, and indoor exercise (e.g., skipping, dancing, yoga) [26].

According to the results of the parents' SDQs, we found that 17.6% of the students were suspected to have emotional or behavioral problems, and low-grade students were considered to be more vulnerable. The percentage of the abnormal range reported in the parents' SDQs was higher than that previously reported in China (12.1%) [11]. Similarly, the percentage of abnormal ranges reported in the SASs of parents and teachers were considerably higher than those of the general population [27], and both were higher for the low-grade groups than the high-grade groups. Previous studies have shown elevated anxiety levels of parents and teachers with children/students in primary schools [28,29]. Therefore, further investigation is required to determine whether the higher levels of anxiety revealed in the study are related to homeschooling.

We found that 83.5% of students, 95.6% of parents, and 83.8% of teachers preferred classroom-based schooling to other styles. Therefore, it is important to restore the classroom-based schooling style as soon as possible if students' and teachers' health and safety can be secured. In cities and provinces where no confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases have been diagnosed within a certain period of time (e.g., 14 days), schools can be reopened with certain measures (e.g., washing hands and changing masks upon entering, maintaining physical distance in classes, limiting after-class activities) [30].

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Integrating students' perspectives about online learning: a hierarchy of factors



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## Abstract

This article reports on a large-scale ( $n = 987$ ), exploratory factor analysis study incorporating various concepts identified in the literature as critical success factors for online learning from the students' perspective, and then determines their hierarchical significance. Seven factors—Basic Online Modality, Instructional Support, Teaching Presence, Cognitive Presence, Online Social Comfort, Online Interactive Modality, and Social Presence—were identified as significant and reliable. Regression analysis indicates the minimal factors for enrollment in future classes—when students consider convenience and scheduling—were Basic Online Modality, Cognitive Presence, and Online Social Comfort. Students who accepted or embraced online courses on their own merits wanted a minimum of Basic Online Modality, Teaching Presence, Cognitive Presence, Online Social Comfort, and Social Presence. Students, who preferred face-to-face classes and demanded a comparable experience, valued Online Interactive Modality and Instructional Support more highly. Recommendations for online course design, policy, and future research are provided.

**Keywords:** Online education, Online teaching, Student perceptions, Online quality, Teaching presence, Cognitive presence, Student presence

## Introduction

While there are different perspectives of the learning process such as learning achievement and faculty perspectives, students' perspectives are especially critical since they are ultimately the *raison d'être* of the educational endeavor (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). More pragmatically, students' perspectives provide invaluable, first-hand insights into their experiences and expectations (Dawson et al., 2019). The student perspective is especially important when new teaching approaches are used and when new technologies are being introduced (Arthur, 2009; Crews & Butterfield, 2014; Van Wart, Ni, Ready, Shayo, & Court, 2020). With the renewed interest in "active" education in general (Arruabarrena, Sánchez, Blanco, et al., 2019; Kay, MacDonald, & DiGiuseppe, 2019; Nouri, 2016; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2017) and the flipped classroom approach in particular (Flores, del-Arco, & Silva, 2016; Gong, Yang, & Cai, 2020; Lundin, et al., 2018; Maycock, 2019; McGivney-Burelle, 2013; O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Tucker, 2012) along with extraordinary shifts in the technology, the student perspective on online education is profoundly important. What shapes students' perceptions of quality integrate are their own sense of learning achievement, satisfaction with the support

they receive, technical proficiency of the process, intellectual and emotional stimulation, comfort with the process, and sense of learning community. The factors that students perceive as quality online teaching, however, has not been as clear as it might be for at least two reasons.

First, it is important to note that the overall online learning experience for students is also composed of non-teaching factors which we briefly mention. Three such factors are (1) convenience, (2) learner characteristics and readiness, and (3) antecedent conditions that may foster teaching quality but are not directly responsible for it. (1) Convenience is an enormous non-quality factor for students (Artino, 2010) which has driven up online demand around the world (Fidalgo, Thormann, Kulyk, et al., 2020; Inside Higher Education and Gallup, 2019; Legon & Garrett, 2019; Ortagus, 2017). This is important since satisfaction with online classes is frequently somewhat lower than face-to-face classes (Macon, 2011). However, the literature generally supports the relative equivalence of face-to-face and online modes regarding learning achievement criteria (Bernard et al., 2004; Nguyen, 2015; Ni, 2013; Sitzmann, Kraiger, Stewart, & Wisher, 2006; see Xu & Jaggars, 2014 for an alternate perspective). These contrasts are exemplified in a recent study of business students, in which online students using a flipped classroom approach outperformed their face-to-face peers, but ironically rated instructor performance lower (Harjoto, 2017). (2) Learner characteristics also affect the experience related to self-regulation in an active learning model, comfort with technology, and age, among others, which affect both receptiveness and readiness of online instruction. (Alqurashi, 2016; Cohen & Baruth, 2017; Kintu, Zhu, & Kagambe, 2017; Kuo, Walker, Schroder, & Belland, 2013; Ventura & Moscoloni, 2015) (3) Finally, numerous antecedent factors may lead to improved instruction, but are not themselves directly perceived by students such as instructor training (Brinkley-Etzkorn, 2018), and the sources of faculty motivation (e.g., incentives, recognition, social influence, and voluntariness) (Wingo, Ivankova, & Moss, 2017). Important as these factors are, mixing them with the perceptions of quality tends to obfuscate the quality factors directly perceived by students.

Second, while student perceptions of quality are used in innumerable studies, our overall understanding still needs to integrate them more holistically. Many studies use student perceptions of quality and overall effectiveness of individual tools and strategies in online contexts such as mobile devices (Drew & Mann, 2018), small groups (Choi, Land, & Turgeon, 2005), journals (Nair, Tay, & Koh, 2013), simulations (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2017), video (Lange & Costley, 2020), etc. Such studies, however, cannot provide the overall context and comparative importance. Some studies have examined the overall learning experience of students with exploratory lists, but have mixed non-quality factors with quality of teaching factors making it difficult to discern the instructor's versus contextual roles in quality (e.g., Asoodar, Vaezi, & Izanloo, 2016; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Hong, 2002; Song, Singleton, Hill, & Koh, 2004; Sun, Tsai, Finger, Chen, & Yeh, 2008). The application of technology adoption studies also fall into this category by essentially aggregating all teaching quality in the single category of performance (Al-Gahtani, 2016; Artino, 2010). Some studies have used high-level teaching-oriented models, primarily the Community of Inquiry model (le Roux & Nagel, 2018), but empirical support has been mixed (Arbaugh et al., 2008); and its elegance (i.e., relying on only three factors) has not provided much insight to practitioners (Anderson, 2016; Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012).

## Research questions

Integration of studies and concepts explored continues to be fragmented and confusing despite the fact that the number of empirical studies related to student perceptions of quality factors has increased. It is important to have an empirical view of what students' value in a single comprehensive study and, also, to know if there is a hierarchy of factors, ranging from students who are least to most critical of the online learning experience. This research study has two research questions.

The first research question is: *What are the significant factors in creating a high-quality online learning experience from students' perspectives?* That is important to know because it should have a significant effect on the instructor's design of online classes. The goal of this research question is identify a more articulated and empirically-supported set of factors capturing the full range of student expectations.

The second research question is: *Is there a priority or hierarchy of factors related to students' perceptions of online teaching quality that relate to their decisions to enroll in online classes?* For example, is it possible to distinguish which factors are critical for enrollment decisions when students are primarily motivated by convenience and scheduling flexibility (minimum threshold)? Do these factors differ from students with a genuine acceptance of the general quality of online courses (a moderate threshold)? What are the factors that are important for the students who are the most critical of online course delivery (highest threshold)?

This article next reviews the literature on online education quality, focusing on the student perspective and reviews eight factors derived from it. The research methods section discusses the study structure and methods. Demographic data related to the sample are next, followed by the results, discussion, and conclusion.

## Literature review

Online education is much discussed (Prinsloo, 2016; Van Wart et al., 2019; Zawacki-Richter & Naidu, 2016), but its perception is substantially influenced by where you stand and what you value (Otter et al., 2013; Tanner, Noser, & Totaro, 2009). Accrediting bodies care about meeting technical standards, proof of effectiveness, and consistency (Grandzol & Grandzol, 2006). Institutions care about reputation, rigor, student satisfaction, and institutional efficiency (Jung, 2011). Faculty care about subject coverage, student participation, faculty satisfaction, and faculty workload (Horvitz, Beach, Anderson, & Xia, 2015; Mansbach & Austin, 2018). For their part, students care about learning achievement (Marks, Sibley, & Arbaugh, 2005; O'Neill & Sai, 2014; Shen, Cho, Tsai, & Marra, 2013), but also view online education as a function of their enjoyment of classes, instructor capability and responsiveness, and comfort in the learning environment (e.g., Asoodar et al., 2016; Sebastianelli, Swift, & Tamimi, 2015). It is this last perspective, of students, upon which we focus.

It is important to note students do not sign up for online classes solely based on perceived quality. Perceptions of quality derive from notions of the capacity of online learning when ideal—relative to both learning achievement and satisfaction/enjoyment, and perceptions about the likelihood and experience of classes living up to expectations. Students also sign up because of convenience and flexibility, and personal notions of suitability about learning. Convenience and flexibility are enormous drivers of online registration (Lee, Stringer, & Du, 2017; Mann & Henneberry, 2012). Even when



students say they prefer face-to-face classes to online, many enroll in online classes and re-enroll in the future if the experience meets minimum expectations. This study examines the threshold expectations of students when they are considering taking online classes.

When discussing students' perceptions of quality, there is little clarity about the actual range of concepts because no integrated empirical studies exist comparing major factors found throughout the literature. Rather, there are practitioner-generated lists of micro-competencies such as the Quality Matters consortium for higher education (Quality Matters, 2018), or broad frameworks encompassing many aspects of quality beyond teaching (Open and Distant Learning Quality Council, 2012). While checklists are useful for practitioners and accreditation processes, they do not provide robust, theoretical bases for scholarly development. Overarching frameworks are heuristically useful, but not for pragmatic purposes or theory building arenas. The most prominent theoretical framework used in online literature is the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2003), which divides instruction into teaching, cognitive, and social presence. Like deductive theories, however, the supportive evidence is mixed (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009), especially regarding the importance of social presence (Annand, 2011; Armellini and De Stefani, 2016). Conceptually, the problem is not so much with the narrow articulation of cognitive or social presence; cognitive presence is how the instructor provides opportunities for students to interact with material in robust, thought-provoking ways, and social presence refers to building a community of learning that incorporates student-to-student interactions. However, teaching presence includes everything else the instructor does—structuring the course, providing lectures, explaining assignments, creating rehearsal opportunities, supplying tests, grading, answering questions, and so on. These challenges become even more prominent in the online context. While the lecture as a single medium is paramount in face-to-face classes, it fades as the primary vehicle in online classes with increased use of detailed syllabi, electronic announcements, recorded and synchronous lectures, 24/7 communications related to student questions, etc. Amassing the pedagogical and technological elements related to teaching under a single concept provides little insight.

In addition to the CoI model, numerous concepts are suggested in single-factor empirical studies when focusing on quality from a student's perspective, with overlapping conceptualizations and nonstandardized naming conventions. Seven distinct factors are derived here from the literature of student perceptions of online quality: Instructional Support, Teaching Presence, Basic Online Modality, Social Presence, Online Social Comfort, cognitive Presence, and Interactive Online Modality.

### **Instructional support**

Instructional Support refers to students' perceptions of techniques by the instructor used for input, rehearsal, feedback, and evaluation. Specifically, this entails providing detailed instructions, designed use of multimedia, and the balance between repetitive class features for ease of use, and techniques to prevent boredom. Instructional Support is often included as an element of Teaching Presence, but is also labeled "structure" (Lee & Rha, 2009; So & Brush, 2008) and instructor facilitation (Eom, Wen, & Ashill,



2006). A prime example of the difference between face-to-face and online education is the extensive use of the “flipped classroom” (Maycock, 2019; Wang, Huang, & Schunn, 2019) in which students move to rehearsal activities faster and more frequently than traditional classrooms, with less instructor lecture (Jung, 2011; Martin, Wang, & Sadaf, 2018). It has been consistently supported as an element of student perceptions of quality (Espasa & Meneses, 2010).

### Teaching presence

Teaching Presence refers to students’ perceptions about the quality of communication in lectures, directions, and individual feedback including encouragement (Jaggars & Xu, 2016; Marks et al., 2005). Specifically, instructor communication is clear, focused, and encouraging, and instructor feedback is customized and timely. If Instructional Support is what an instructor does before the course begins and in carrying out those plans, then Teaching Presence is what the instructor does while the class is conducted and in response to specific circumstances. For example, a course could be well designed but poorly delivered because the instructor is distracted; or a course could be poorly designed but an instructor might make up for the deficit by spending time and energy in elaborate communications and ad hoc teaching techniques. It is especially important in student satisfaction (Sebastianelli et al., 2015; Young, 2006) and also referred to as instructor presence (Asoodar et al., 2016), learner-instructor interaction (Marks et al., 2005), and staff support (Jung, 2011). As with Instructional Support, it has been consistently supported as an element of student perceptions of quality.

### Basic online modality

Basic Online Modality refers to the competent use of basic online class tools—online grading, navigation methods, online grade book, and the announcements function. It is frequently clumped with instructional quality (Artino, 2010), service quality (Mohammadi, 2015), instructor expertise in e-teaching (Paechter, Maier, & Macher, 2010), and similar terms. As a narrowly defined concept, it is sometimes called technology (Asoodar et al., 2016; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Sun et al., 2008). The only empirical study that did not find Basic Online Modality significant, as technology, was Sun et al. (2008). Because Basic Online Modality is addressed with basic instructor training, some studies assert the importance of training (e.g., Asoodar et al., 2016).

### Social presence

Social Presence refers to students’ perceptions of the quality of student-to-student interaction. Social Presence focuses on the quality of shared learning and collaboration among students, such as in threaded discussion responses (Garrison et al., 2003; Kehrwald, 2008). Much emphasized but challenged in the CoI literature (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009), it has mixed support in the online literature. While some studies found Social Presence or related concepts to be significant (e.g., Asoodar et al., 2016; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Eom et al., 2006; Richardson, Maeda, Lv, & Caskurlu, 2017), others found Social Presence insignificant (Joo, Lim, & Kim, 2011; So & Brush, 2008; Sun et al., 2008).

**Online social comfort**

Online Social Comfort refers to the instructor's ability to provide an environment in which anxiety is low, and students feel comfortable interacting even when expressing opposing viewpoints. While numerous studies have examined anxiety (e.g., Liaw & Huang, 2013; Otter et al., 2013; Sun et al., 2008), only one found anxiety insignificant (Asoodar et al., 2016); many others have not examined the concept.

**Cognitive presence**

Cognitive Presence refers to the engagement of students such that they perceive they are stimulated by the material and instructor to reflect deeply and critically, and seek to understand different perspectives (Garrison et al., 2003). The instructor provides instructional materials and facilitates an environment that piques interest, is reflective, and enhances inclusiveness of perspectives (Durabi, Arrastia, Nelson, Cornille, & Liang, 2011). Cognitive Presence includes enhancing the applicability of material for student's potential or current careers. Cognitive Presence is supported as significant in many online studies (e.g., Artino, 2010; Asoodar et al., 2016; Joo et al., 2011; Marks et al., 2005; Sebastianelli et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2008). Further, while many instructors perceive that cognitive presence is diminished in online settings, neuroscientific studies indicate this need not be the case (Takamine, 2017). While numerous studies failed to examine Cognitive Presence, this review found no studies that lessened its significance for students.

**Interactive online modality**

Interactive Online Modality refers to the "high-end" usage of online functionality. That is, the instructor uses interactive online class tools—video lectures, videoconferencing, and small group discussions—well. It is often included in concepts such as instructional quality (Artino, 2010; Asoodar et al., 2016; Mohammadi, 2015; Otter et al., 2013; Paechter et al., 2010) or engagement (Clayton, Blumberg, & Anthony, 2018). While individual methods have been investigated (e.g. Durabi et al., 2011), high-end engagement methods have not.

Other independent variables affecting perceptions of quality include age, undergraduate versus graduate status, gender, ethnicity/race, discipline, educational motivation of students, and previous online experience. While age has been found to be small or insignificant, more notable effects have been reported at the level-of-study, with graduate students reporting higher "success" (Macon, 2011), and community college students having greater difficulty with online classes (Legon & Garrett, 2019; Xu & Jaggars, 2014). Ethnicity and race have also been small or insignificant. Some situational variations and student preferences can be captured by paying attention to disciplinary differences (Arbaugh, 2005; Macon, 2011). Motivation levels of students have been reported to be significant in completion and achievement, with better students doing as well across face-to-face and online modes, and weaker students having greater completion and achievement challenges (Clayton et al., 2018; Lu & Lemonde, 2013).

## Research methods

### Overview

To examine the various quality factors, we apply a critical success factor methodology, initially introduced to schools of business research in the 1970s. In 1981, Rockhart and Bullen codified an approach embodying principles of critical success factors (CSFs) as a way to identify the information needs of executives, detailing steps for the collection and analysis of data to create a set of organizational CSFs (Rockhart & Bullen, 1981). CSFs describe the underlying or guiding principles which must be incorporated to ensure success.

Utilizing this methodology, CSFs in the context of this paper define key areas of instruction and design essential for an online class to be successful from a student's perspective. Instructors implicitly know and consider these areas when setting up an online class and designing and directing activities and tasks important to achieving learning goals. CSFs make explicit those things good instructors may intuitively know and (should) do to enhance student learning. When made explicit, CSFs not only confirm the knowledge of successful instructors, but tap their intuition to guide and direct the accomplishment of quality instruction for entire programs. In addition, CSFs are linked with goals and objectives, helping generate a small number of truly important matters an instructor should focus attention on to achieve different thresholds of online success.

After a comprehensive literature review, an instrument was created to measure students' perceptions about the importance of techniques and indicators leading to quality online classes. Items were designed to capture the major factors in the literature. The instrument was pilot studied during academic year 2017–18 with a 397 student sample, facilitating an exploratory factor analysis leading to important preliminary findings (reference withheld for review). Based on the pilot, survey items were added and refined to include seven groups of quality teaching factors and two groups of items related to students' overall acceptance of online classes as well as a variable on their future online class enrollment. Demographic information was gathered to determine their effects on students' levels of acceptance of online classes based on age, year in program, major, distance from university, number of online classes taken, high school experience with online classes, and communication preferences.

### Sample

This paper draws evidence from a sample of students enrolled in educational programs at Jack H. Brown College of Business and Public Administration (JHBC), California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB). The JHBC offers a wide range of online courses for undergraduate and graduate programs. To ensure comparable learning outcomes, online classes and face-to-face classes of a certain subject are similar in size—undergraduate classes are generally capped at 60 and graduate classes at 30, and often taught by the same instructors. Students sometimes have the option to choose between both face-to-face and online modes of learning.

A Qualtrics survey link was sent out by 11 instructors to students who were unlikely to be cross-enrolled in classes during the 2018–19 academic year.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 2500 students were contacted, with some instructors providing class time to complete the anonymous survey. All students, whether they had taken an online class or not, were

encouraged to respond. Nine hundred eighty-seven students responded, representing a 40% response rate. Although drawn from a single business school, it is a broad sample representing students from several disciplines—management, accounting and finance, marketing, information decision sciences, and public administration, as well as both graduate and undergraduate programs of study.

The sample age of students is young, with 78% being under 30. The sample has almost no lower division students (i.e., freshman and sophomore), 73% upper division students (i.e., junior and senior) and 24% graduate students (master's level). Only 17% reported having taken a hybrid or online class in high school. There was a wide range of exposure to university level online courses, with 47% reporting having taken 1 to 4 classes, and 21% reporting no online class experience. As a Hispanic-serving institution, 54% self-identified as Latino, 18% White, and 13% Asian and Pacific Islander. The five largest majors were accounting & finance (25%), management (21%), master of public administration (16%), marketing (12%), and information decision sciences (10%). Seventy-four percent work full- or part-time. See Table 1 for demographic data.

### Measures and procedure

To increase the reliability of evaluation scores, composite evaluation variables are formed after an exploratory factor analysis of individual evaluation items. A principle component method with Quartimin (oblique) rotation was applied to explore the factor construct of student perceptions of online teaching CSFs. The item correlations for student perceptions of importance coefficients greater than .30 were included, a commonly acceptable ratio in factor analysis. A simple least-squares regression analysis was applied to test the significance levels of factors on students' impression of online classes.

## Results

### Exploratory factor constructs

Using a threshold loading of 0.3 for items, 37 items loaded on seven factors. All factors were logically consistent. The first factor, with eight items, was labeled Teaching Presence. Items included providing clear instructions, staying on task, clear deadlines, and customized feedback on strengths and weaknesses. Teaching Presence items all related to instructor involvement during the course as a director, monitor, and learning facilitator. The second factor, with seven items, aligned with Cognitive Presence. Items included stimulating curiosity, opportunities for reflection, helping students construct explanations posed in online courses, and the applicability of material. The third factor, with six items, aligned with Social Presence defined as providing student-to-student learning opportunities. Items included getting to know course participants for sense of belonging, forming impressions of other students, and interacting with others. The fourth factor, with six new items as well as two ("interaction with other students" and "a sense of community in the class") shared with the third factor, was Instructional Support which related to the instructor's roles in providing students a cohesive learning experience. They included providing sufficient rehearsal, structured feedback, techniques for communication, navigation guide, detailed syllabus, and coordinating student

**Table 1** Demographic Information of the Participants (*n* = 987)

|                                  | Freq. | Valid % <sup>a</sup> |
|----------------------------------|-------|----------------------|
| Age                              |       |                      |
| < =22                            | 406   | 42%                  |
| 23–29                            | 348   | 36%                  |
| 29–34                            | 105   | 11%                  |
| 35–40                            | 47    | 5%                   |
| > =41                            | 72    | 7%                   |
| Year in Program                  |       |                      |
| Freshman                         | 8     | 1%                   |
| Sophomore                        | 11    | 1%                   |
| Junior                           | 359   | 36%                  |
| Senior                           | 363   | 37%                  |
| Other                            | 5     | 1%                   |
| Graduate                         | 241   | 24%                  |
| Had HD/OL classes in high school |       |                      |
| Yes                              | 167   | 17%                  |
| No                               | 811   | 83%                  |
| Number of HD/OL classes taken    |       |                      |
| 0                                | 215   | 21%                  |
| 1–2                              | 272   | 27%                  |
| 3–4                              | 224   | 22%                  |
| 5–6                              | 158   | 15%                  |
| 7 and above                      | 154   | 15%                  |
| Race                             |       |                      |
| Latino                           | 525   | 54%                  |
| White                            | 175   | 18%                  |
| African American                 | 60    | 6%                   |
| Asian Pacific Islander           | 128   | 13%                  |
| Other                            | 90    | 9%                   |
| Major                            |       |                      |
| Accounting & Finance             | 242   | 25%                  |
| Management                       | 207   | 21%                  |
| Marketing                        | 118   | 12%                  |
| Public Administration            | 73    | 7%                   |
| Information Decision Sciences    | 96    | 10%                  |
| Other (non-business students)    | 11    | 1%                   |
| MBA                              | 75    | 8%                   |
| MPA                              | 160   | 16%                  |
| MSA                              | 2     | 0%                   |
| Working Status                   |       |                      |
| Not working                      | 260   | 27%                  |
| Part-time                        | 357   | 37%                  |
| Full-time                        | 361   | 37%                  |

<sup>a</sup>Percent eliminating missing values

interaction and creating a sense of online community. This factor also included enthusiasm which students generally interpreted as a robustly designed course, rather than animation in a traditional lecture. The fifth factor was labeled Basic Online Modality and focused on the basic technological requirements for a functional online course. Three items included allowing students to make online submissions, use of online gradebooks, and online grading. A fourth item is the use of online quizzes, viewed by students as mechanical practice opportunities rather than small tests and a fifth is navigation, a key component of Online Modality. The sixth factor, loaded on four items, was labeled Online Social Comfort. Items here included comfort discussing ideas online, comfort disagreeing, developing a sense of collaboration via discussion, and considering online communication as an excellent medium for social interaction. The final factor was called Interactive Online Modality because it included items for “richer” communications or interactions, no matter whether one- or two-way. Items included videoconferencing, instructor-generated videos, and small group discussions. Taken together, these seven explained 67% of the variance which is considered in the acceptable range in social science research for a robust model (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). See Table 2 for the full list.

To test for factor reliability, the Cronbach alpha of variables were calculated. All produced values greater than 0.7, the standard threshold used for reliability, except for system trust which was therefore dropped. To gauge students’ sense of factor importance, all items were means averaged. Factor means (lower means indicating higher importance to students), ranged from 1.5 to 2.6 on a 5-point scale. Basic Online Modality was most important, followed by Instructional Support and Teaching Presence. Students deemed Cognitive Presence, Social Online Comfort, and Online Interactive Modality less important. The least important for this sample was Social Presence. Table 3 arrays the critical success factor means, standard deviations, and Cronbach alpha.

To determine whether particular subgroups of respondents viewed factors differently, a series of ANOVAs were conducted using factor means as dependent variables. Six demographic variables were used as independent variables: graduate vs. undergraduate, age, work status, ethnicity, discipline, and past online experience. To determine strength of association of the independent variables to each of the seven CSFs, eta squared was calculated for each ANOVA. Eta squared indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. Eta squared values greater than .01, .06, and .14 are conventionally interpreted as small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively (Green & Salkind, 2003). Table 4 summarizes the eta squared values for the ANOVA tests with Eta squared values less than .01 omitted.

While no significant differences in factor means among students in different disciplines in the College occur, all five other independent variables have some small effect on some or all CSFs. Graduate students tend to rate Online Interactive Modality, Instructional Support, Teaching Presence, and Cognitive Presence higher than undergraduates. Elder students value more Online Interactive Modality. Full-time working students rate all factors, except Social Online Comfort, slightly higher than part-timers and non-working students. Latino and White rate Basic Online Modality and Instructional Support higher; Asian and Pacific Islanders rate Social

**Table 2** Critical Success Factor Loading<sup>a</sup>

| Survey Items                                                                                                                             | Factor 1<br>Teaching<br>Presence | Factor 2<br>Cognitive<br>Presence | Factor 3<br>Social<br>Presence | Factor 4<br>Instructional<br>Support | Factor 5<br>Basic<br>Online<br>Modality | Factor 6<br>Online<br>Social<br>Comfort | Factor 7<br>Interactive<br>Modality |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Online instructor provides clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.                                       | 0.8165                           |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online instructor helps keep the course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.                                           | 0.7801                           |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online instructor clearly communicates important due dates/time frames for learning activities.                                          | 0.7651                           |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online instructor provides feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives. | 0.7611                           |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online instructor provides feedback in a timely fashion.                                                                                 | 0.7293                           |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online instructor clearly communicates important course goals.                                                                           | 0.6956                           |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online instructor helps to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me to learn.                                         | 0.6379                           |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online instructor encourages course participants to explore new concepts in this course.                                                 | 0.6345                           |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online course provide opportunities for meaningful reflection on course content                                                          |                                  | 0.8525                            |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online learning activities help me construct explanations/solutions in online courses.                                                   |                                  | 0.8408                            |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Course activities stimulate my curiosity in online courses.                                                                              |                                  | 0.7206                            |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| I can apply the knowledge created in online courses to my work or other non-class related activities.                                    |                                  | 0.6945                            |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| I can utilize a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in online courses.                                              |                                  | 0.6628                            |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online discussions are valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives.                                                         |                                  | 0.5518                            |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Posing problems in online courses increases my interest in course issues.                                                                |                                  | 0.4220                            |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Getting to know other                                                                                                                    |                                  |                                   | 0.7551                         |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |



**Table 2** Critical Success Factor Loading<sup>a</sup> (Continued)

| Survey Items                                                                                                     | Factor 1<br>Teaching<br>Presence | Factor 2<br>Cognitive<br>Presence | Factor 3<br>Social<br>Presence | Factor 4<br>Instructional<br>Support | Factor 5<br>Basic<br>Online<br>Modality | Factor 6<br>Online<br>Social<br>Comfort | Factor 7<br>Interactive<br>Modality |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| course participants gives me a sense of belonging in the course.                                                 |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| I am able to form distinct impressions of other course participants.                                             |                                  |                                   | 0.6484                         |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| interaction with other students                                                                                  |                                  |                                   | 0.6390                         | 0.3125                               |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| a sense of community in the class                                                                                |                                  |                                   | 0.5509                         | 0.4327                               |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for social interaction.                                 |                                  |                                   | 0.5026                         |                                      |                                         | 0.3080                                  |                                     |
| including student goals                                                                                          |                                  |                                   | 0.3950                         |                                      |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| sufficient rehearsal of material, skills to be learned, etc.                                                     |                                  |                                   |                                | 0.7241                               |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| instructor providing feedback                                                                                    |                                  |                                   |                                | 0.6852                               |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| instructor having enthusiasm                                                                                     |                                  |                                   |                                | 0.6610                               |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| the use of a variety of techniques to communicate and learn                                                      |                                  |                                   |                                | 0.4724                               |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| navigation (e.g., being able to find what you want)                                                              |                                  |                                   |                                | 0.4010                               | 0.3227                                  |                                         |                                     |
| syllabus (more detailed than in a face-to-face class)                                                            |                                  |                                   |                                | 0.3546                               |                                         |                                         |                                     |
| allowing students to make online submissions                                                                     |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      | 0.8136                                  |                                         |                                     |
| online gradebook                                                                                                 |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      | 0.7464                                  |                                         |                                     |
| online grading of assignments by instructors                                                                     |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      | 0.7409                                  |                                         |                                     |
| online quizzes                                                                                                   |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      | 0.3308                                  |                                         |                                     |
| I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions.                                                      |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         | 0.8816                                  |                                     |
| I felt comfortable disagreeing with other classmates in online courses while still maintaining a sense of trust. |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         | 0.8149                                  |                                     |
| Online discussions help me to develop a sense of collaboration.                                                  |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         | 0.5301                                  |                                     |
| Zoom or other videoconference methods                                                                            |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         | 0.9238                              |
| video lectures                                                                                                   |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         | 0.7540                              |
| small groups discussions (chat rooms)                                                                            |                                  |                                   |                                |                                      |                                         |                                         | 0.4920                              |

<sup>a</sup>Seven factors explain 67% of the variance. Decimal places and loadings less than .30 omitted

**Table 3** Priorities of CSFs and Factor Reliability

| Rank <sup>a</sup> | Critical Success Factors    | # of Items | n   | Mean   | Std Dev | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----|--------|---------|---------------------|
| 1                 | Basic Online Modality       | 5          | 818 | 1.4590 | 0.5521  | 0.7663              |
| 2                 | Instructional Support       | 8          | 816 | 1.6513 | 0.6403  | 0.8405              |
| 3                 | Teaching Presence           | 8          | 796 | 1.8270 | 0.7461  | 0.9233              |
| 4                 | Cognitive Presence          | 7          | 791 | 2.1715 | 0.7890  | 0.8957              |
| 5                 | Online Social Comfort       | 4          | 809 | 2.2464 | 0.9978  | 0.8602              |
| 6                 | Online Interactive Modality | 3          | 818 | 2.2637 | 0.9892  | 0.7853              |
| 7                 | Social Presence             | 6          | 803 | 2.5571 | 0.9020  | 0.8611              |

<sup>a</sup> Ranking is based on the average mean of students' ranking importance of survey items: 1 = Very High, 2 = High, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat Low, and 5 = Very Low; Lower averages indicate greater importance

Presence higher. Students who have taken more online classes rate all factors higher.

In addition to factor scores, two variables are constructed to identify the resultant impressions labeled online experience. Both were logically consistent with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  greater than 0.75. The first variable, with six items, labeled "online acceptance," included items such as "I enjoy online learning," "My overall impression of hybrid/online learning is very good," and "the instructors of online/hybrid classes are generally responsive." The second variable was labeled "face-to-face preference" and combines four items, including enjoying, learning, and communicating more in face-to-face classes, as well as perceiving greater fairness and equity. In addition to these two constructed variables, a one-item variable was also used subsequently in the regression analysis: "online enrollment." That question asked: if hybrid/online classes are well taught and available, how much would online education make up your entire course selection going forward?

**Table 4** Eta Squared Values for Significant ANOVAs

| Independent Variables                                                                                                             | Critical Success Factors (from most to least important) |                       |                   |                    |                       |                             |                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
|                                                                                                                                   | Basic online modality                                   | Instructional support | Teaching presence | Cognitive presence | Online Social Comfort | Online interactive modality | Social presence |
| <i>Graduate vs. Undergraduate</i><br>Graduates rate these factors higher than undergraduates                                      |                                                         | 0.01                  | 0.01              | 0.01               |                       | 0.05                        |                 |
| <i>Age</i><br>Elder students rate this factor higher                                                                              |                                                         |                       |                   |                    |                       | 0.03                        |                 |
| <i>Work Status</i><br>Working students rate these factors higher                                                                  | 0.02                                                    | 0.02                  | 0.02              | 0.03               |                       | 0.01                        | 0.01            |
| <i>Ethnicity</i><br>Latino and White rate basic online modality and instructional support higher; API rate social presence higher | 0.02                                                    | 0.03                  |                   |                    |                       |                             | 0.03            |
| <i>Discipline</i><br>No significant difference found across 5 disciplines                                                         |                                                         |                       |                   |                    |                       |                             |                 |
| <i>Online Experience</i><br>Students who have taken more online classes rate all these factors higher                             | 0.02                                                    | 0.01                  | 0.03              | 0.03               | 0.01                  | 0.01                        | 0.01            |

Eta Squared > 0.01 small effect, Eta Squared > 0.06 medium effect, Eta Squared > 0.14 large effect

### Regression results

As noted above, two constructed variables and one item were used as dependent variables for purposes of regression analysis. They were online acceptance, F2F preference, and the selection of online classes. In addition to seven quality-of-teaching factors identified by factor analysis, control variables included level of education (graduate versus undergraduate), age, ethnicity, work status, distance to university, and number of on-line/hybrid classes taken in the past. See Table 5.

When the ETA squared values for ANOVA significance were measured for control factors, only one was close to a medium effect. Graduate versus undergraduate status had a .05 effect (considered medium) related to Online Interactive Modality, meaning graduate students were more sensitive to interactive modality than undergraduates. Multiple regression analysis of critical success factors and online impressions were conducted to compare under what conditions factors were significant. The only consistently significant control factor was number of online classes taken. The more classes students had taken online, the more inclined they were to take future classes. Level of

**Table 5** Description of Variables

|                               | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dependent Variable</b>     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Online Acceptance             | Minus log sum of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) rating of 6 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.8002$ ): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I enjoy online learning.</li> <li>• My overall impression of hybrid/online learning is very good.</li> <li>• I often speak or communicate to others in online classes.</li> <li>• The instructors of online/hybrid classes are generally responsive.</li> <li>• Instructors reduce and catch cheating effectively in hybrid/online classes.</li> <li>• I am comfortable with online learning technologies.</li> </ul> |
| F2F Preference                | Minus log sum of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) rating of 4 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.7525$ ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I enjoy face-to-face classes more.</li> <li>• I learn more in face-to-face classes.</li> <li>• I often speak or communicate to others in face-to-face classes.</li> <li>• I think that fairness and equity is better in face-to-face classes.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                               |
| Selection Online Class        | Log percent online class selection going forward                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Independent Variables</b>  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Undergraduate (vs. graduate)  | Graduate (1) vs. Undergraduate (0)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Age                           | Log year of age                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Race                          | White (1), African American (2), API (3), Latino (4), and Other (5)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Work Status                   | Full Time (2), Part Time (1), Not Work (0)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Distance to University        | Log number of miles away from campus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Number of HD/OL Classes Taken | Log number of classes taken                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Basic Online Modality         | Minus Factor score                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Instructional Support         | Minus Factor score                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Teaching Presence             | Minus Factor score                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Cognitive Presence            | Minus Factor score                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Online Social Comfort         | Minus Factor score                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Interactive Modality          | Minus Factor score                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Social Presence               | Minus Factor score                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

program, age, ethnicity, and working status do not significantly affect students' choice or overall acceptance of online classes.

The least restrictive condition was online enrollment (Table 6). That is, students might not feel online courses were ideal, but because of convenience and scheduling might enroll in them if minimum threshold expectations were met. When considering online enrollment three factors were significant and positive (at the 0.1 level): Basic Online Modality, Cognitive Presence, and Online Social Comfort. These least-demanding students expected classes to have basic technological functionality, provide good opportunities for knowledge acquisition, and provide comfortable interaction in small groups. Students who demand good Instructional Support (e.g., rehearsal opportunities, standardized feedback, clear syllabus) are less likely to enroll.

Online acceptance was more restrictive (see Table 7). This variable captured the idea that students not only enrolled in online classes out of necessity, but with an appreciation of the positive attributes of online instruction, which balanced the negative aspects. When this standard was applied, students expected not only Basic Online Modality, Cognitive Presence, and Online Social Comfort, but expected their instructors to be highly engaged virtually as the course progressed (Teaching Presence), and

**Table 6** Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis: Online Class Enrollment

| Analysis of Variance               |          | Online Class Enrollment |             |                    |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Source                             | DF       | Sum of Squares          | Mean square | F Ratio            |
| Model                              | 17       | 80.62                   | 4.74        | 12.51              |
| Error                              | 686      | 260.15                  | 0.38        | <b>Prob &gt; F</b> |
| C. Total                           | 703      | 340.77                  |             | <.0001             |
| Parameter Estimates                |          |                         |             |                    |
| Term                               | Estimate | Std Error               | t Ratio     | Prob >  t          |
| Intercept                          | 3.66     | 0.08                    | 44.19       | <.0001***          |
| Undergraduate (vs. graduate)       | −0.02    | 0.03                    | −0.59       | 0.5546             |
| Age                                | −0.04    | 0.06                    | −0.67       | 0.5000             |
| African American (vs. White)       | −0.08    | 0.08                    | −0.98       | 0.3297             |
| Asian Pacific Islander (vs. White) | 0.19     | 0.07                    | 2.85        | 0.0045***          |
| Latino (vs. White)                 | 0.04     | 0.04                    | 0.89        | 0.3752             |
| Other Race (vs. White)             | −0.12    | 0.07                    | −1.66       | 0.0978*            |
| Nonworking (vs. full-time working) | 0.06     | 0.04                    | 1.58        | 0.1149             |
| Nonworking (vs. part-time working) | −0.03    | 0.04                    | −0.69       | 0.4928             |
| Distance to University             | 0.03     | 0.02                    | 1.31        | 0.1922             |
| Number of HD/OL Classes Taken      | 0.19     | 0.03                    | 5.69        | <.0001***          |
| Basic Online Modality              | 0.08     | 0.03                    | 2.45        | 0.0144**           |
| Instructional Support              | −0.10    | 0.03                    | −3.03       | 0.0026***          |
| Teaching Presence                  | 0.00     | 0.04                    | 0.12        | 0.9023             |
| Cognitive Presence                 | 0.20     | 0.04                    | 4.95        | <.0001***          |
| Online Social Comfort              | 0.06     | 0.03                    | 1.65        | 0.0997*            |
| Interactive Modality               | 0.00     | 0.03                    | −0.05       | 0.9591             |
| Social Presence                    | 0.04     | 0.03                    | 1.24        | 0.2136             |

\* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$

**Table 7** Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis: Online Class Acceptance

| Analysis of Variance               |          | Online Acceptance |             |                    |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Source                             | DF       | Sum of Squares    | Mean Square | F Ratio            |
| Model                              | 17       | 37.19             | 2.19        | 37.97              |
| Error                              | 693      | 39.93             | 0.06        | <b>Prob &gt; F</b> |
| C. Total                           | 710      | 77.13             |             | <.0001             |
| Parameter Estimates                |          |                   |             |                    |
| Term                               | Estimate | Std Error         | t Ratio     | Prob >  t          |
| Intercept                          | −2.61    | 0.03              | −81.27      | <.0001***          |
| Undergraduate (vs. graduate)       | 0.00     | 0.01              | −0.17       | 0.8672             |
| Age                                | −0.01    | 0.02              | −0.50       | 0.6194             |
| African American (vs. White)       | −0.03    | 0.03              | −1.07       | 0.2847             |
| Asian Pacific Islander (vs. White) | 0.03     | 0.03              | 0.98        | 0.3260             |
| Latino (vs. White)                 | 0.02     | 0.02              | 1.17        | 0.2414             |
| Other Race (vs. White)             | −0.02    | 0.03              | −0.84       | 0.3992             |
| Nonworking (vs. full-time working) | 0.00     | 0.01              | −0.06       | 0.9516             |
| Nonworking (vs. part-time working) | 0.00     | 0.02              | −0.16       | 0.8714             |
| Distance to University             | 0.00     | 0.01              | −0.60       | 0.5516             |
| Number of HD/OL Classes Taken      | 0.06     | 0.01              | 4.48        | <.0001***          |
| Basic Online Modality              | 0.05     | 0.01              | 4.05        | <.0001***          |
| Instructional Support              | −0.05    | 0.01              | −3.96       | <.0001***          |
| Teaching Presence                  | 0.07     | 0.01              | 5.15        | <.0001***          |
| Cognitive Presence                 | 0.11     | 0.02              | 6.77        | <.0001***          |
| Online Social Comfort              | 0.05     | 0.01              | 3.80        | 0.0002***          |
| Interactive Modality               | 0.01     | 0.01              | 0.53        | 0.5972             |
| Social Presence                    | 0.06     | 0.01              | 4.61        | <.0001***          |

\*\*\* $p < .01$ 

to create strong student-to-student dynamics (Social Presence). Students who rated Instructional Support higher are less accepting of online classes.

Another restrictive condition was catering to the needs of students who preferred face-to-face classes (see Table 8). That is, they preferred face-to-face classes even when online classes were well taught. Unlike students more accepting of, or more likely to enroll in, online classes, this group rates Instructional Support as critical to enrolling, rather than a negative factor when absent. Again different from the other two groups, these students demand appropriate interactive mechanisms (Online Interactive Modality) to enable richer communication (e.g., videoconferencing). Student-to-student collaboration (Social Presence) was also significant. This group also rated Cognitive Presence and Online Social Comfort as significant, but only in their absence. That is, these students were most attached to direct interaction with the instructor and other students rather than specific teaching methods. Interestingly, Basic Online Modality and Teaching Presence were not significant. Our interpretation here is this student group, most critical of online classes for its loss of physical interaction, are beyond being concerned with mechanical technical interaction and demand higher levels of interactivity and instructional sophistication.

**Table 8** Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis: F2F Preference

| Analysis of Variance               |          | F2F Preference |             |                    |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Source                             | DF       | Sum of Squares | Mean Square | F Ratio            |
| Model                              | 17.00    | 19.35          | 1.1384      | 9.36               |
| Error                              | 693.00   | 84.25          | 0.12158     | <b>Prob &gt; F</b> |
| C. Total                           | 710.00   | 103.60         |             | <.0001             |
| Parameter Estimates                |          |                |             |                    |
| Term                               | Estimate | Std Error      | t Ratio     | Prob >  t          |
| Intercept                          | −2.10    | 0.05           | −44.99      | <.0001***          |
| Undergraduate (vs. graduate)       | 0.03     | 0.02           | 1.36        | 0.1729             |
| Age                                | 0.02     | 0.03           | 0.77        | 0.4417             |
| African American (vs. White)       | −0.01    | 0.05           | −0.19       | 0.8460             |
| Asian Pacific Islander (vs. White) | 0.01     | 0.04           | 0.23        | 0.8174             |
| Latino (vs. White)                 | −0.04    | 0.02           | −1.52       | 0.1300             |
| Other Race (vs. White)             | 0.04     | 0.04           | 0.89        | 0.3733             |
| Nonworking (vs. full-time working) | 0.03     | 0.02           | 1.58        | 0.1147             |
| Nonworking (vs. part-time working) | −0.03    | 0.02           | −1.49       | 0.1355             |
| Distance to University             | 0.00     | 0.01           | 0.00        | 0.9997             |
| Number of HD/OL Classes Taken      | −0.11    | 0.02           | −5.63       | <.0001***          |
| Basic Online Modality              | 0.01     | 0.02           | 0.74        | 0.4583             |
| Instructional Support              | 0.07     | 0.02           | 3.83        | 0.0001***          |
| Teaching Presence                  | −0.03    | 0.02           | −1.35       | 0.1759             |
| Cognitive Presence                 | −0.06    | 0.02           | −2.68       | 0.0076***          |
| Online Social Comfort              | −0.06    | 0.02           | −3.28       | 0.0011***          |
| Interactive Modality               | 0.03     | 0.02           | 1.68        | 0.0937*            |
| Social Presence                    | 0.08     | 0.02           | 4.10        | <.0001***          |

\* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ 

### Discussion and study limitations

Some past studies have used robust empirical methods to identify a single factor or a small number of factors related to quality from a student's perspective, but have not sought to be relatively comprehensive. Others have used a longer series of itemized factors, but have less used less robust methods, and have not tied those factors back to the literature. This study has used the literature to develop a relatively comprehensive list of items focused on quality teaching in a single rigorous protocol. That is, while a Beta test had identified five coherent factors, substantial changes to the current survey that sharpened the focus on quality factors rather than antecedent factors, as well as better articulating the array of factors often lumped under the mantle of "teaching presence." In addition, it has also examined them based on threshold expectations: from minimal, such as when flexibility is the driving consideration, to modest, such as when students want a "good" online class, to high, when students demand an interactive virtual experience equivalent to face-to-face.

Exploratory factor analysis identified seven factors that were reliable, coherent, and significant under different conditions. When considering students' overall sense of importance, they are, in order: Basic Online Modality, Instructional Support, Teaching Presence, Cognitive Presence, Social Online Comfort, Interactive Online Modality, and

Social Presence. Students are most concerned with the basics of a course first, that is the technological and instructor competence. Next they want engagement and virtual comfort. Social Presence, while valued, is the least critical from this overall perspective.

The factor analysis is quite consistent with the range of factors identified in the literature, pointing to the fact that students can differentiate among different aspects of what have been clumped as larger concepts, such as teaching presence. Essentially, the instructor's role in quality can be divided into her/his command of basic online functionality, good design, and good presence during the class. The instructor's command of basic functionality is paramount. Because so much of online classes must be built in advance of the class, quality of the class design is rated more highly than the instructor's role in facilitating the class. Taken as a whole, the instructor's role in traditional teaching elements is primary, as we would expect it to be. Cognitive presence, especially as pertinence of the instructional material and its applicability to student interests, has always been found significant when studied, and was highly rated as well in a single factor. Finally, the degree to which students feel comfortable with the online environment and enjoy the learner-learner aspect has been less supported in empirical studies, was found significant here, but rated the lowest among the factors of quality to students.

Regression analysis paints a more nuanced picture, depending on student focus. It also helps explain some of the heterogeneity of previous studies, depending on what the dependent variables were. If convenience and scheduling are critical and students are less demanding, minimum requirements are Basic Online Modality, Cognitive Presence, and Online Social Comfort. That is, students' expect an instructor who knows how to use an online platform, delivers useful information, and who provides a comfortable learning environment. However, they do not expect to get poor design. They do not expect much in terms of the quality teaching presence, learner-to-learner interaction, or interactive teaching.

When students are signing up for critical classes, or they have both F2F and online options, they have a higher standard. That is, they not only expect the factors for decisions about enrolling in noncritical classes, but they also expect good Teaching and Social Presence. Students who simply need a class may be willing to teach themselves a bit more, but students who want a good class expect a highly present instructor in terms responsiveness and immediacy. "Good" classes must not only create a comfortable atmosphere, but in social science classes at least, must provide strong learner-to-learner interactions as well. At the time of the research, most students believe that you can have a good class *without* high interactivity via pre-recorded video and videoconference. That may, or may not, change over time as technology thresholds of various video media become easier to use, more reliable, and more commonplace.

The most demanding students are those who prefer F2F classes because of learning style preferences, poor past experiences, or both. Such students (seem to) assume that a worthwhile online class has basic functionality and that the instructor provides a strong presence. They are also critical of the absence of Cognitive Presence and Online Social Comfort. They want strong Instructional Support and Social Presence. But in addition, and uniquely, they expect Online Interactive Modality which provides the greatest verisimilitude to the traditional classroom as possible. More than the other two groups, these students crave human interaction in the learning process, both with the instructor and other students.



These findings shed light on the possible ramifications of the COVID-19 aftermath. Many universities around the world jumped from relatively low levels of online instruction in the beginning of spring 2020 to nearly 100% by mandate by the end of the spring term. The question becomes, what will happen after the mandate is removed? Will demand resume pre-crisis levels, will it increase modestly, or will it skyrocket? Time will be the best judge, but the findings here would suggest that the ability/interest of instructors and institutions to “rise to the occasion” with quality teaching will have as much effect on demand as students becoming more acclimated to online learning. If in the rush to get classes online many students experience shoddy basic functional competence, poor instructional design, sporadic teaching presence, and poorly implemented cognitive and social aspects, they may be quite willing to return to the traditional classroom. If faculty and institutions supporting them are able to increase the quality of classes despite time pressures, then most students may be interested in more hybrid and fully online classes. If instructors are able to introduce high quality interactive teaching, nearly the entire student population will be interested in more online classes. Of course students will have a variety of experiences, but this analysis suggests that those instructors, departments, and institutions that put greater effort into the temporary adjustment (and who resist less), will be substantially more likely to have increases in demand beyond what the modest national trajectory has been for the last decade or so.

There are several study limitations. First, the study does not include a sample of non-respondents. Non-responders may have a somewhat different profile. Second, the study draws from a single college and university. The profile derived here may vary significantly by type of student. Third, some survey statements may have led respondents to rate quality based upon experience rather than assess the general importance of online course elements. “I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions,” could be revised to “comfort in participating in course discussions.” The authors weighed differences among subgroups (e.g., among majors) as small and statistically insignificant. However, it is possible differences between biology and marketing students would be significant, leading factors to be differently ordered. Emphasis and ordering might vary at a community college versus research-oriented university (Gonzalez, 2009).

**Acknowledgements**

None.

**Authors' contributions**

Equal. The author(s) read and approved the final manuscript.

**Funding**

No external funding/ NA.

**Availability of data and materials**

We will make the data available.

**Competing interests**

We have no competing interests.

Received: 29 April 2020 Accepted: 30 July 2020

Published online: 02 December 2020

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# EXPLORING PARENTS' HOME-BASED INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S ENGLISH LEARNING: TRIGGERS AND BARRIERS

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## Abstract

In Indonesian context, English has been taught in elementary school level and parents' involvement is considered as one of the influencing factors which has contribution to the children's language learning achievement. The rapid, complex and continuous societal changes in this digital era might impact and alter the possibilities of parents' involvement in their children's language learning. The current study explored the triggers and the barriers of parents' home-based involvement in their children's English language learning and the features of their involvement. The qualitative research by implementing semi-structured, in- depth interview with four parents of elementary students at one of private schools in Yogyakarta city was conducted. The findings show the three main triggers in parents' home-based involvement namely: (1) parents' belief of the importance of English, (2) the implementation of school technological learning tools and (3) parents' expectation of their children academic achievement. While the barriers that parents encounter in their involvement are: (1) parents' lack of time, (2) parents' unproficiency in English and (3) parents' unfamiliarity with the use of technological tools. As the features of involvement, the study reveals parents' monitoring, accompaniment, assistances in their children's home-learning activities, providing some additional English learning media and financing English private course.

**Keywords:** Barriers, Children's English Language Learning, Parents' Home-Based Involvement, Triggers

## INTRODUCTION

Since English has been globally used, it has significant roles in many human's domains, such as education, culture, politics, industry and ICT. Moreover, many countries have begun to introduce English teaching as a foreign language at an earlier level in the curriculum (Butler, 2014). In the Indonesian context, English as a foreign language has been taught at the primary school level due to the revision of 1994 curriculum. Accordingly, Indonesian students can start to learn English at their young age, elementary school level, in which there are some factors that affect the success of the language learning achievement. Parents' involvement has become one of the influencing factors for young children in language learning as it can provide motivation and encouragement during the processes (Hosseinpour, 2015; Rahman, 2015). Nevertheless, the rapid, complex and continuous societal changes in this digital era might impact and alter the possibilities of the triggers, barriers and features in parents' involvement.

Parents' involvement can be defined as the dedication of the parents' resources to their children. It is a multidimensional structure which consists of parents's educational desires, parents' decisions and plans for their children, and indeed, their engagement in children's school tasks (Ule, Živoder, & Bois-reymond, 2015). Parents' participation in their children's education processes can be categorized into school-based and home-based involvement (Jeynes, 2007 as

cited in Dewi et al., 2017). Parents' home-based involvement covers providing the supportive environment, stimulating children's intellectual stimulation, supervising homework completion and parent-children discussion (Benner et al., 2016). Meanwhile, parents' school-based involvement includes the activities that parents undertake regarding to their participation in school organizations and also in other school events (Benner et al., 2016). Furthermore, Poyraz, (2017); Jafarov, (2015) and Larocque et al., (2011) assert that some aspects such as socio-economic situation and parents' educational experience can affect parents' involvement in their children language learning. Additionally, children's age contributes great influence on parents' activeness in their children's English language learning since it will decrease as children grade levels increase (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Poyraz, 2017)

School's learning platform technologies are considered to increase parental involvement since these tools provide parents an access to gain information and resources related to their children's education as well as to support and review their children learning (Selwyn et al., 2011; Willis & Exley, 2018). Research has shown that children's outcomes including behaviour, attendance, well being and academic achievement improve when parents highly get involved in their learning processes (Povey et al., 2016; Wilder, 2014) Moreover, the learning platform technologies are utilized to ensure the learning continuity by replicating the learning environment at home due to extreme learning conditions such as school closure. (Selwyn et al., 2011). However, the inability of parents to access the technological tools can be one of the obstacles (Goodall, 2017) and some parents regard learning platform merely just as an additional burden for them (Poyraz, 2017). Additionally, (Jafarov, 2015) states that parents lack of time can be one of problems in parental involvement.

Parents' involvement might also been triggered by their perception and belief of the importance of the language learning (Dewi et al., 2017; Mosty & Lefever, 2013). Several researches reveal that English is perceived by most parents as a crucial language which their children need to acquire and it becomes more essential than for the parents themselves (Xiaoyi, 2017). Similarly, Wei (2011) discovers that both bilingual education and non-bilingual education parents view English as the important feature for their children future life. This perspective supports Fiszbein & Stanton (2018) who consider learning at early childhood as a necessary investment. In addition, parents believe that learning foreign language can increase their children's self-image and confidence (Lin, Ching-Ying & Chen, 2016). Mastering English will also support children in learning more knowledge as well as accessing a lot of information (Reddy & English, 2016). Further, it will help them to achieve more understanding and capability in applying technology in this digital era because most of internet sites use English as the language instruction.

Castillo & Gamez (2013) as cited in Shelor (2016) suggests parents to play critical roles in supporting children to develop their language learning at home. It can be implemented by providing various learning media as it is commonly perceived that children learning language by doing something interesting through their five senses (Brown, 2007). Additionally, Fatt (2000) argues that visual aids: pictures, flash cards, books, games and printed materials can help children learn language as well as build their creative thinking through what they see. Meanwhile, Brannon, Dauksas, Coleman, Israelson, & Williams (2013) reveal that literacy home activities such as dialog reading and shared reading have been examined to be beneficial in English language learning. On the other hand, Kayalar & Kayalar (2017) investigate that auditory learning can be both determinative and significative for effective language learning. While, audio-visual media such as television, video, YouTube, computer and films are claimed to be more attractive for children since they can listen and watch at the same time (Idris et al.,

2018). Accordingly, Shyamlee & Phil (2012) state that audio-visual can stimulate children building their analytical, creative and productive skills.

There are always some challenges when dealing with children learn second language compared with adults as their cognitive and linguistic are still immature (Xiaoyi, 2017). Children are unlike adults who usually use their abstract and logical ways in processing the knowledge of language because they take less anxiety in learning second language (Gürsoy & Akin, 2013). The low level of parents' education can be the factor which leads to their less involvement in their children language acquisition since they are not confident enough to use English for communication (Poyraz, 2017). Nevertheless, Castillo & Gamez (2013) as cited in Shelor (2016) describes how non-native parents may involve in the process of children second language acquisition by giving an analogy that to teach children ride a bike parents do not necessarily have to be able to ride a bike. It is in line with Xuesong (2006) who discovered that parents kept on assisting their children's learning although they didn't master English.

Some previous studies related to the parents' involvement in their children's English language learning have been conducted. The first study was carried out by Xuesong (2006) to investigate parents' involvement in a group of students from urban China. The results indicated that parents played a significant role in their children's English learning. Parents exposed the English language to their children with some strategies such as giving continuous encouragement in learning English, providing English learning in TV program and financing children for English course. Another study was undertaken by Xiaoyi (2017) to explore how parents involved in children's learning in an English center in China. The results of the research revealed that in the context of English training center, parents got involved in their children's English learning by asking their children about their learning, accompanying and supervising homework, building communication with teachers, joining school activities and administering for extra-curricular courses. Additionally, Poyraz (2017) undertook a research on parents' involvement in their children's home-based English activities and the result showed that their awareness of the importance of the involvement increase as they have higher education level.

In Indonesian context, English has been taught at the elementary school level as a foreign language. As a result, Indonesian students begin to learn English at their young age. In this case, parents play significant role to provide continual encouragement and motivation to their children's English language learning (Daniel et al., 2018). However, the rapid, complex and continuous societal changes in this digital era might impact and alter the possibilities related to the parents' involvement. Based on this background, the current study attempted to explore the triggers and barriers of parents' home-based involvement in their children's English language learning and also to find out the features of their involvement. The qualitative research by implementing semi-structured, in-depth interview with four parents of elementary school students at one of private schools in Yogyakarta city was conducted. In order to meet the objectives, the research questions were formulated:

1. What are the triggers and barriers of the parents' home-based involvement in their children's English language learning?
2. How do parents involve themselves in their children's English language learning activities?

## METHOD

This study aimed at exploring the parents' home-based involvement in their children's English

language learning. The researchers collected the data by employing qualitative descriptive that enabled the researchers to gain rich data of parents' feeling, thoughts, perspectives, and experiences regarding to the research topic (Seidman 2006; Creswell 2014), and examined the data to provide a description of their home based involvement in their children's English learning.

Purposive sampling was chosen by the researcher to select the sample of participants. The four selected participants were the mothers of elementary school students at one of the private schools in Yogyakarta city which has implemented some technological learning tools. The female parents were chosen since parent's gender can be one of the contributing factors in parental involvement level (Feuerstein & Feuerstein, 2010; Jafarov, 2015). In this case, mothers might spend more time dealing with their children's home learning activity (Jordan et al., 2002). The background of children age, 6.5 – 8.5 years old, became another consideration as it is in accordance with Hornby & Lafaele (2011); Jafarov (2015) and Poyraz (2017) who reveal that students' age has been an issue affecting the level of parental involvement in which it will decrease in upper grades. In addition, some other parents' background in terms of occupation and educational level were also considered in the selection in order to gain a broad range of perspectives. According to Poyraz (2017), parents' various background might affect the parental involvement. The parent-participants various background is displayed in the following table:

| Background        | Parent 1 (P1)          | Parent 2 (P2)          | Parent 3 (P3)          | Parent 4 (P4)          |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Gender            | Female                 | Female                 | Female                 | Female                 |
| Occupation        | Dentist                | Lecturer               | House wife             | Plant Seller           |
| Educational level | Bachelor of Dentistry  | Post Graduate          | High school            | High school            |
| Children's age    | 6,5                    | 7                      | 7.5                    | 8,5                    |
| Children's grade  | 1 <sup>st</sup> grader | 2 <sup>nd</sup> grader | 2 <sup>nd</sup> grader | 3 <sup>rd</sup> grader |

In order to gain the data the researchers did the interview and recorded it. The semi-structured, in- depth interview was implemented in this study since it is one of the instruments that can be used in to gather the data in a qualitative research (Gopaldas, 2016; Levitt et al., 2017). Based on consideration of the theoretical background of the research topic (Kvale, 2007) to process the analyzing interview, the main concepts of the theoretical background were concisely categorized in order to formulate the interview questions. Accordingly, the researchers developed some questions based on the theoretical categories. In reference to Lin, Ching-Ying & Chen (2016); Mosty & Lefever, (2013); Povey et al., (2016); Reddy & English (2016); Selwyn et al., (2011); Wei, (2011); Wilder, 2014; Willis & Exley (2018); M. Xiaoyi (2017), the researchers asked the participants about the triggers of their involvement. Additionally, the researcher focused on asking the participants the barriers of their involvement (Goodall, 2017; Jafarov, 2015; Poyraz, 2017; Xuesong, 2006).

Finally, in accordance to Benner et al., (2016) the researcher asked the participants the features of their involvement in their children's English language learning. The interview questions were formulated in the following table.

| No | Categories                           | Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | The triggers of parents' involvement | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your perception/belief of English language learning? Does it trigger your involvement in your children's English language learning? Please share your experience.</li> <li>2. How do the technological learning tools that are implemented by the school impact your involvement? Please share your experience.</li> <li>3. Do you have expectations of your children academic achievement? Do they influence your home-based involvement? Please share your experience.</li> </ol>                                             |
| 2. | The barriers of parents' involvement | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Do you have sufficient time in your parental home-based involvement?</li> <li>5. Do you encounter barriers in your involvement in your children language learning which related to socio-economic situation? Please share your experience.</li> <li>6. Does your level of English ability become an obstacle to get involved in your children language learning? Please share your experience.</li> <li>7. Do you find impediments in your involvement related to the school implementation of technological learning tools?</li> </ol> |
| 3. | The features of parents' involvement | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. How do you involve yourself in your children's English language learning?</li> <li>9. Do you provide some learning media for your children's English language learning? Please share your experience.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

Table 2

Finally, after collecting data the researcher did transcribing, describing, and deep analyzing the data in order to code them into some inter-related categories. Three main categories which emerged were the triggers of parents' home-based involvement, the barriers of parents' home-based involvement and the features of parental home-based involvement.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### The Triggers of Parents' Home-Based involvement

The data reveals that there are some triggers in parents' home-based involvement. Parent 1 believed that learning English was very valuable for her daughter since she thought that her child needed to be equipped with English proficiency in consideration of the status of English as an international language. This belief had been a trigger for her to support her daughter in learning English. Moreover, she perceived that home-based parental involvement was crucial for her daughter more specially when dealing with new English learning platforms. She expected that her involvement could enhance her daughter's academic achievement:

*"In my view English has been an international language and it becomes a trigger for everyone to have a capability in English. That's why I always support my daughter to learn English as I know how important English is. I believe if my daughter is proficient in English, it will be very useful for her future. Furthermore, I believe that parents'*



*home-based involvement is crucial for my daughter, more specially now she has to deal with some digital learning platforms in learning English at home such as Google Meet, Google classroom, YouTube and some online English exercises. Of course, these new learning platforms really need more parents' involvement because my daughter is still 6 years old. I hope that I can help her to enhance her academic achievement".* (Parent 1)

Similarly, Parent 2 perceived English as the international language for going global and it was very important to be learned by her kid for successful communication. Further, based on her view home-based parental involvement was significant for her daughter's learning progress in English and it became more demanding due to the use of technological platforms in learning.

*"In my view English is the International language, it is the language for going global. I encourage and support my daughter to love English because English is one of the important elements for successful communication. I have set goals for her specially related to her English learning attainment. I hope that she will be able to understand, to communicate as well as be familiar with it. I value that when I get involved in my kid' home learning, it will be significant and it will be an encouragement for her. Regularly I try to give consistent assist to my daughter' in completing any English tasks, more specially, now there some changes in educational learning system where she has to attend any virtual classes including English which, of course, it requires more parents' involvement. (Parent 2)*

Parent 3 viewed that learning English was important for her child to have better future. Also, she perceived that home-based parents' involvement was beneficial for her kid to gain learning progress and academic achievement. She always tried her best to get involved in her kid's English learning specially when her kid dealt with some technological tools utilized by the school:

*"I believe English is very important to be learned by my child because it will help him to be able to compensate in the development of this increasingly advanced era. More specially it will be useful for his future careers as they have a "plus value" (English competence) and the opportunity to be successful is wide open. I hope that my child will get the better future than us (his parents). in my opinion, parents' support and engagement in children learning will be meaningful for them because parents must be the ones who understand them most. For me personally, as a full- time house wife, I always have time to get involved in my son's English home learning. Moreover, the school implementation of some digital tools in learning requires me to get involved as the learning activities mostly held at home."(Parent 3)*

Meanwhile, Parent 4 stated that it was important to learn English to be able deal with digital technology for gaining knowledge. In her perception, children could get their best attainment in learning if there was a consistent support from their parents since they still depended on their parents. Additionally, she believed that the changes of learning deliverance using digital tools really called for more parents' involvement. However, in her view, not all parents were ready for the changes, including she herself due to some factors:

*"I believe that English is important to be learned by son because this modern era has required everyone to be able to communicate in English as well as to gain knowledge using digital technology. I observe that recently my child always learns his school lessons by using any digital platforms such us Zoom, YouTube and any online exercises*



*which mostly using English. Of course, this phenomenon has called for parents to get involved more in children home learning. However, I think not all of parents are ready to deal with this change including me myself due to some factors.” (Parent 4)*

The data above shows that parents have some triggers in their parental home-based involvement in their children’s English language learning. The first trigger is parents’ belief of the importance of English. They perceive that English, as international language, is important to be learned by their children. Furthermore, they view that their children need to be proficient in English in order to support them in achieving their successful future careers and also to equip them in gaining knowledge and information through digital technology which mostly using English. While, the second trigger is the school implementation of technological learning tools which requires more parents’ involvement. The children still depend on their parents to deal with technological tools in learning. Finally, the third trigger is parents’ expectation of their children academic achievement. They expect that their involvement will enhance their children best attainment in learning.

### **The Barriers of Parents’ Home-Based Involvement**

The data reveals that parents still encounter with some barriers in their parental home-based involvement. Parent 1 said that her impediment was related to the lack of time availability to accompany her child doing home learning due to her job as a dentist, however, she was able to deal with this problem:

*“Unfortunately, due to my job as a dentist I cannot always assist my daughter in her home learning. To deal with this situation I often ask for my mom (her grandma) and her private teacher to help me accompany my daughter in her home learning. Also, I always monitor my daughter’s learning through phone call or video call.” (parent 1)*

While parent 3 stated that her unproficiency in English had been her barrier in her involvement:

*“I think my kid mostly still needs me to assist him engaging in his English lesson specially to understand the learning topic, to complete any English tasks and also to have tests preparation. Honestly, I still have obstacle in assisting my kid’s English learning since I am not proficient and not fluent in English yet I hope that my kid will have better English competence than me. I try best to assist my kid’s learning in spite of my obstacles.” (Parent 3)*

Parent 4 believed that getting involved in her kid’s home learning activities was really needed, however, she had very limited time for assisting her kid’s English home learning due to the family socio-economic situation in which she had to make money outside home. The unfamiliarity in using technological tools also had been another impediment that she encountered.

*“Personally, I believe that fully getting involved in my kid’s English learning is very demanding specially when dealing with any online tasks. I think in his age, my kid still needs my accompaniment in completing her English tasks. However, it becomes dilemma for me since at the same time my husband and me have to earn money by going around selling plants. We have limited time to assist our daughter to do her home learning tasks. As a result, sometime my daughter could not submit her learning*

*tasks on time. The unfamiliarity of using technological tools also becomes the other obstacles. It is hard me to be fully involved in my kid's home learning process."* (Parent 4)

The data above reveals barriers that parents encounter in their home-based involvement. Those are related to parents' lack of time, parents' unproficiency in English and parents' unfamiliarity with the use of technological tools.

### **The Features of Parents' Home-Based Involvement**

Parent 1 dedicated her efforts to get involved in her daughter' English learning by monitoring her English learning activities, providing some fun media though videos and also financing the private course.

*"Even though I can't always be at home to accompany my daughter's learning but I try to be regularly getting involved in my daughter's English home learning activities, such as monitoring her English tasks completion, rechecking her homework, having discussion with my daughter, preparing her test material and compiling all of her English material files in a folder. We also finance our daughter a private English course to support her acquiring English. Additionally, I provide some fun English learning media to enhance her daughter's English ability through videos."* (Parent 1)

Similarly, parent 2 provided guidance and accompaniment for her kid's English home learning as well as additional English learning media in which her kid would be able to practice English both written and oral English.

*"I usually talk to them in English with simple words/sentences, and encourage them to practice periodically so that English becomes a familiar language at home. I support them with English story books, and I usually read aloud when reading it so that they are familiar to listen to English story and English vocabulary as well. I provide both of my children additional English learning media at the English course where they can have more access to learn and practice English both written and oral English. I usually encourage my children to do their homework or tasks by themselves, then I check their works after completing. It is the time when I give them inputs so that they know their competence to improve."* (Parent 2)

Even though Parent 3 was not fluent in English but she kept on accompanying her son to accomplish his English school assignments and provided internet access to find some supporting learning media such us YouTube videos, English songs and children's English movies. Sometimes she asked her son to practice some fun English games:

*"Though I am not proficient and not fluent in English as I was not good in English when I was at my school but I try to dedicate my best efforts to support my son in learning English. I always accompany him to accomplish English school assignments and help him if he has any difficulties. I provide internet access so that he can search his favorite English songs and movies. Sometimes I ask my son to practice some fun English games that we find from YouTube. I think that my son and me learn English together."* (Parent 3)

Parent 4 provided limited assistance and accompaniment for her daughter's home learning because of her job:

*"I have limited time to involve in my daughter's home-learning as I have to work outside. I have consulted this impediment to the teacher then my daughter is allowed to do her home learning in the evening session."* (Parent 4)

Based on the data gathered home-based parental involvement can be in the forms of parents constant monitoring, parents' accompaniment and parents' assistances in their children's learning at home activities. Financing an English private course and providing additional English learning media such as videos, online games, English songs and English story books become the other features of parents' support in their children's English learning.

## Discussion

The result shows there are three main triggers in parents home-based involvement: the first trigger is parents' belief in the language learning. Parents perceive English, as international language, is important to be learned by their children in order to support them in achieving their successful future careers and gaining knowledge and information through digital technology. This finding supports (Dewi et al., 2017 ; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006; Mosty & Lefever, 2013; Reddy & English, 2016; Xiaoyi, 2017) who assert that children's language learning might be mainly indicated by both belief and attitude possessed by parents in the language. The second trigger is the school implementation of technological learning tools which requires more parents' involvement since the children still depend on their parents to deal with these tools in learning.

The finding is in line with Selwyn et al., (2011) and Willis & Exley (2018) who claim that school's learning platforms technologies are considered to increase parental involvement as parents will be enabled to gain information and resources related to their children's education as well as to support and review their children's learning. While the third trigger is parents' expectation of their children academic achievement. They expect that their involvement will enhance their children best attainment in learning. This finding is in correlation with Hosseinpour (2015); Povey et al., (2016); Rahman, (2015) who argue that parental involvement provides motivation and encouragement during the learning processes. The data above reveals barriers that parents encounter in their home-based involvement. The first barrier is the lack of parental time availability. This finding corresponds with Jafarov (2015) who states that parents lack of time can be one of problems in parental involvement. The insufficient time in parental involvement might be related to the family socio-economic situation as parent 3 experiences with. This result is in relation with Poyraz (2017); Jafarov (2015); Larocque et al., (2011) who assert that socio-economic situation can affect parents' involvement in their children language learning. The second problem is parents' unproficiency in English. This finding supports (Poyraz, 2017) who claims that the parents' incompetence in English due to the low level of education can be the factor which leads to their less involvement in their children language learning. While the fourth impediment is parents' unfamiliarity with the use of technological tools. It is in accordance with Goodall, 2017 and Povey et al., 2016 who discover that the inability of parents to access the technological tools can be one of the obstacles and some parents regard learning platform merely just as an additional burden for them.

Based on the data gathered home-based parental involvement are in the forms of parents constant monitoring, parents' accompaniment, parents' assistances, parents-child discussion in

their children's learning at home activities and financing an English private course. This finding is in correlation with Benner et al., (2016); Castillo & Gamez (2013) who state that parents can play critical roles in supporting children to develop their language learning at home. Providing additional English learning media such as videos, online games English songs and English story books become the other features of parents' support in their children's English learning. This result is in correlation with (Idris et al., 2018) who claim that audio-visual media is more attractive for children since they can listen and watch at the same time. Additionally, Brannon et al., (2013) describe that literacy home activity has been examined as a beneficial English language learning.

## CONCLUSION

The results display the triggers, barriers and features of parents' home-based involvement. There are three main triggers in the parents' home-based involvement in children's English language learning. The first trigger is parents' belief of the importance of English. While, the second trigger is the school implementation of technological learning tools which requires more parents' involvement. Finally, the third trigger is parents' expectation of their children academic achievement. The finding also reveals the barriers that parents encounter in their home-based involvement. Those are related to parents' lack of time, parents' unproficiency in English and parents' unfamiliarity with the use of technological tools. Finally, it is revealed that the features of home-based parental involvement emerged in the forms of parents' constant monitoring, parents' accompaniment and parents' assistances in their children's learning at home activities. Financing an English private course and providing additional English learning media such as videos, online games, English songs and English story books become the other features of parents' support in their children's English learning. Since this study was conducted by exploring parents' involvement whose children study at school which located in a city. We recommend further research to investigate the involvement of parents whose children study in rural areas.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to all the participants who have been willing to get involved in this study. We also gratefully appreciate all friends and relatives who have contributed to the completion of this study.

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# Parental Home Monitoring and Support and Students' Online Learning and Socioemotional Well-Being During COVID-19 School Suspension in Hong Kong

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## OPEN ACCESS

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authorship

### Specialty section:

This article was submitted to  
Educational Psychology,  
a section of the journal  
Frontiers in Psychology

Received: 09 April 2022

Accepted: 18 May 2022

Published: 02 June 2022

### Citation:

Tan CY, Pan Q, Zhang Y, Lan M  
and Law N (2022) Parental Home  
Monitoring and Support  
and Students' Online Learning  
and Socioemotional Well-Being  
During COVID-19 School Suspension  
in Hong Kong.  
Front. Psychol. 13:916338.  
doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.916338

Contextualized in the prolonged period of COVID-19-related school suspension in Hong Kong, the present study unravels relationships among socioeconomic status (SES), parental involvement, and learning outcomes for a matched sample of 186 primary and 932 secondary school students and their parents who participated in the eCitizen Education 360 survey. Three-step latent profile analysis (LPA) revealed different types of parental involvement at home and in school. For the primary school sample, students' SES did not predict membership in the parental involvement typology, but students whose parents provided more home monitoring and support had the highest level of online self-efficacy. As for the secondary student sample, students whose parents provided more home monitoring and support tended to have access to more home learning resources. Students whose parents provided home monitoring and support had the highest levels of online self-efficacy, acquisition of digital skills, and cognitive-emotional regulation, and were the least worried about school resumption. The study underscores complex patterns of parental involvement and identifies effective parental involvement practices that contribute to students' home online learning during the school suspension.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, online learning, parental involvement, school closure, self-efficacy, self-regulation, socioeconomic status, socioemotional learning

## INTRODUCTION

Students in many education systems experienced prolonged periods of school suspension during COVID-19. For example, students in Hong Kong switched from face-to-face lessons in school to home-based online learning in January–May/June 2020 as the city implemented various measures to contain the community spread of the virus. The transition in learning modes affected student learning in many ways. First, compared to face-to-face school-based lessons, the effectiveness of home online learning is influenced by the availability of socioeconomic status (SES)-related family resources and parental involvement (Livingstone et al., 2018; Bol, 2020). Second, students need to be self-regulated and self-efficacious to manage their own learning during online sessions (Hwang et al., 2017; Eyimaya and Irmak, 2021). Third, students struggle to cope with the uncertainty of learning modality during and after the school suspension (Spinelli et al., 2020).



Given the different contexts in which students learn during the school suspension period as compared to pre-pandemic times, it is imperative to advance our understanding of how SES, parental involvement, students' socioemotional well-being, and online learning are related in three key areas. First, we need to unravel what parents are doing to support students' learning and well-being, especially in lower-SES families during home-based online learning (Kerr et al., 2021; Low and Mounts, 2021; Radey et al., 2021; Fosco et al., 2022; Ilari et al., 2022). Studies have found that parents encounter different challenges in trying to support student learning during the school suspension (Agaton and Cueto, 2021; Akinrinmade et al., 2021; Alshwiah, 2021; Chen C. Y. C. et al., 2022), so insights gleaned from research in this area will advance our knowledge on social stratification and equity in student learning.

Second, we need to understand how parental involvement contributes to students' learning and socioemotional well-being during the school suspension (Demir and Demir, 2021; Lawrence and Fakuade, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2022). The knowledge gleaned from research in this area can inform parental involvement practices in the *New Normal* of education—situations that call for agile switching across blended, fully online (asynchronous or bichronous), or hybrid (combining face-to-face and online synchronous at the same time) learning modes (Martin et al., 2020; Morse et al., 2022), which may be compelled by future episodes of mandatory school suspension or in support of pedagogical innovation initiatives.

Third, the onset of sustained home-based online learning during school suspension underscores the importance of and challenges to ensuring students' socioemotional well-being (Mactavish et al., 2021). Before the pandemic, some schools may have experienced a tension between prioritizing students' academic achievement and enhancing students' socioemotional well-being. However, the school suspension has challenged this bifurcation because students need to have high levels of socioemotional well-being to be adaptive during sustained home-based online learning without face-to-face social support from friends and teachers (Durna and Kosterelioglu, 2021; Allen et al., 2022). The knowledge gleaned from research on students' socioemotional well-being during the school suspension can inform the design of school-based support programs that enhance students' self-efficacy, cognitive-emotional self-regulation, and ability to cope with anxiety (Anderson et al., 2021; Hatzichristou et al., 2021; Lorenzo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

The present study addresses these three key areas by investigating how a specific aspect of family factors, namely parental involvement, can contribute to primary and secondary students' online learning during the school suspension in Hong Kong.

## Parental Involvement

The study builds on the conceptualization of parental involvement as comprising home and school involvement. For example, Epstein (1995) conceptualized parental involvement as creating a conducive home environment for children, communicating with schools, volunteering in school activities,

supporting children's home learning, participating in school decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Lareau (2003) examined how parents communicate with their children, negotiate with school authorities for special accommodations to address their children's learning needs, and organize their children's time to develop the latter's potential. These different aspects of parental involvement can be summarized as home and school involvement (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Home involvement includes parent-child discussions, parental monitoring of children's learning, and parents building a positive relationship with their children (McNeal, 1999). School involvement includes parent-teacher discussions on children's learning and parental participation in school activities (Castro et al., 2015).

It is noteworthy that the literature on parental involvement is largely contextualized in pre-COVID-19 times when formal student learning occurs in school settings *via* face-to-face lessons, and parents assume supporting roles to complement what teachers do at school. During the pandemic-induced school suspension, students spend large amounts of time having online lessons at home and parents have to assume a wider range of roles such as being the student's learning supervisor, tutor, and home-schooling teacher (Agaton and Cueto, 2021). Morse et al. (2022) found that Australian caregivers who had home-schooled at least one child during COVID-19 were confronted with challenges such as connecting with the children, managing work-life-school balance, and facilitating home-schooling although they were not trained as teachers. Demir and Demir's (2021) study found that parents of elementary and secondary school students in Turkey had to ensure that their children followed the lessons and motivate their children. In so doing, they became more aware of what their children were learning and appreciated the value of the teachers and the school more. These studies suggest that the distinction between home and school involvement is being blurred and parents may have different patterns of involvement during the pandemic-induced school suspension. However, research has not investigated parental involvement patterns during the school suspension although there are studies unraveling different patterns of parental attitudes toward home learning (Pratama and Firmansyah, 2021). This is the first knowledge gap that the present study will address using latent profile analysis of the patterns of parental home and school involvement before and during the school suspension.

## Socioeconomic Status and Parental Involvement

Socioeconomic status measures individuals' hierarchical ranking reflecting their access to or control over valued resources necessary for success (Mueller and Parcel, 1981). Research has shown that SES has an enduring influence on students' physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development (Bradley and Corwyn, 2002). Common SES measures include parents' educational attainment and occupational status, family income and home resources (Sirin, 2005). Among the four indicators, studies have shown that parental education and home resources (especially educational) are more strongly associated with students' learning outcomes (Sirin, 2005).

Parents who are more highly educated may be more involved for many reasons. At a personal level, they have higher levels of personal drive and determination (Crane, 1996). From a cultural perspective, these parents have benefited from the education system, so they are more inclined to be involved in activities that enable their children to also succeed academically (Portes and MacLeod, 1996). At home, they are more likely to provide cognitively stimulating and developmentally appropriate learning experiences for their children, engage their children in intellectually enriching conversations, and possess higher educational aspirations for their children (Reay, 1998; Kellaghan, 2001; Park and Holloway, 2013; Hartas, 2015). They are also more equipped to advise their children on school matters and help with their children's homework. As for the SES indicator of home resources, parents with more of these resources are able to use these resources to support their children's learning (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992). Therefore, parents with more home resources are more likely to have higher levels of involvement.

In the domain of school involvement, higher-SES parents may be more confident in engaging with their children's teachers and they are more proactive in soliciting school resources to support their children's learning (Reay, 1998). In contrast, lower SES parents may be less involved in their children's education because of barriers they have to surmount (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Wang et al., 2016; Malone, 2017). These barriers include time and resource constraints, poor knowledge of their children's homework, and communication issues with their children (Wang et al., 2016).

Research on the association between SES and parental involvement during the pandemic-induced school suspension where students have to learn at home is tentative and results are mixed at best, thereby pointing to the second knowledge gap. For example, Agaton and Cueto (2021) found that parents from marginalized families living in rural areas in the Philippines were confronted with various challenges that impeded involvement as the learning supervisor, tutor, and home-schooling teacher in their children's home-based learning during the pandemic. These challenges included financial difficulties during the lockdown and difficulty in accessing and using technology for online learning. Relatedly, Radey et al. (2021) reported that low-income, single mothers in the United States selected home-based care and schooling during the pandemic because of safety or financial constraints. In another study, Chen C. Y. C. et al. (2022) reported that parents from different SES backgrounds in the United States had different concerns that affected their parental involvement. Parents of low- and lower-middle-SES backgrounds encountered more financial and material hardship during the pandemic. In contrast, parents with higher income were stressed over how to structure their home learning environments and plan home educational and physical activities for their children. In a study examining parental-child relationships and interactions, Ilari et al. (2022) did not find differences in different aspects of parenting among parents with different levels of education in the United States during the lockdown. These parenting aspects were related to positive parenting (using praise and compliments for children), use of discipline in parenting, positive relationships (parental modeling and promoting positive interactions with

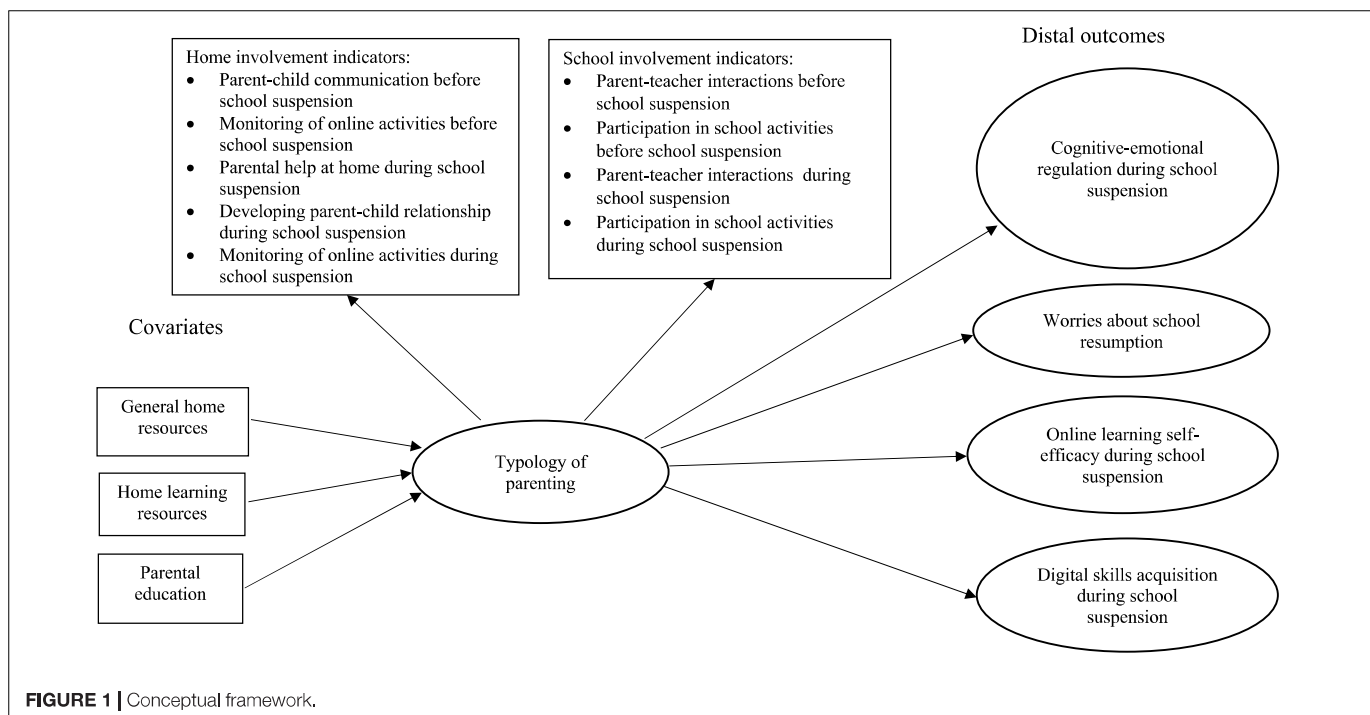
children), positive parental emotional states, parenting self-efficacy, and routine management of children's daily activities. The present study will address this second knowledge gap by investigating the pattern of parental involvement for parents varying in their education and home resources, as SES indicators, in the latent profile analysis.

## Parental Involvement and Students' Socioemotional Well-Being

As teaching and learning is conducted online during the pandemic-induced school suspension, it is important to understand students' online learning outcomes and socioemotional well-being. However, studies have tended to examine students' socioemotional well-being rather than students' online learning outcomes. Research shows that students' socioemotional well-being is often adversely affected during the pandemic-induced school suspension when lessons are conducted online. For example, Chen Y. et al.'s (2022) longitudinal study found that adolescents in Sweden had higher levels of stress and psychosomatic symptoms and lower levels of happiness following the onset of the pandemic. Mactavish et al. (2021) found that students in Ontario reported worse well-being (e.g., worries, happiness) and psychological distress during the pandemic when compared to pre-pandemic times. Durna and Kosterelioglu (2021) reported that teachers in Turkey perceived that students' socioemotional well-being was adversely affected during the pandemic. Kamaşak et al. (2022) found that students in Turkey were more introverted, irritable, and pessimistic during the pandemic.

There is empirical evidence that parental involvement influences students' socioemotional well-being during the pandemic-induced school suspension when teaching and learning is conducted online. Allen et al.'s (2022) study of secondary school students in Australia found that when parents focused on identifying and cultivating their children's positive attributes, students became more adaptive and resilient during the pandemic. Furthermore, students' positive reappraisal and emotional processing was significantly associated with their stress-related growth, and these psychological factors mediated the effects of strength-based parenting on their growth. Spinelli et al.'s (2021) Italian study showed that more "chaotic" households had higher levels of parenting stress, parents who were more stressed were less involved in their children's learning, and students whose parents were less involved were less able to regulate their own emotions. Mactavish et al. (2021) reported that student-perceived social support from family and friends was related to less severe post-traumatic stress symptoms and it attenuated the increase in psychological distress in Ontario. Wang et al. (2021) found that adolescents who received more parental social support had higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect in the United States. Liu et al. (2021) reported that higher levels of parental academic involvement and lower levels of parent-child communication was associated with higher levels of middle school student depression during the pandemic in China. Yang et al.'s (2022) study showed that middle school students in China had higher levels of affective





engagement in their learning if they had involved parents and supportive teachers.

The present study examines how parental involvement is related to students' cognitive-emotional regulation strategies during the school suspension and their worries about school resumption. Cognitive-emotional regulation strategies include students learning to cope with emotional experiences arousing from negative events, such as their perceived worries for future study and life. Medrano et al. (2016) showed that cognitive-emotional regulation can moderate the effects induced by emotional states on adolescents' academic self-efficacy. A healthy parent-child relationship and parental monitoring are both associated with students' cognitive-emotional regulation strategies (Chen and Chng, 2016; Hapunda et al., 2019). However, it is unclear how students' cognitive-emotional regulation behaviors can be influenced or protected by parental involvement (Moilanen et al., 2018), particularly with parents and children spending more time together during the pandemic lockdowns.

## Parental Involvement and Students' Online Learning

Some researchers have investigated how parental involvement influences students' online learning outcomes. With the rapid development of online learning, some may perceive a lesser need for parental guidance and intervention. However, research shows that online learning may require parents to play an instructional role in their children's learning (Borup et al., 2013). For instance, a study in Hong Kong found that some children were unable to complete learning tasks independently during the school suspension due to a lack of learning interests and home environment-related limitations (Lau and Lee, 2021). Furthermore, students may pervasively use electronic devices

(e.g., for browsing social media) without parental mediation during the school suspension (Lau and Lee, 2021), thereby resulting in lower levels of online learning. Therefore, it is unsurprising when Lawrence and Fakuade (2021) reported from their study that, compared to the adolescents' learning participation, parental involvement contributed more to the online learning commitment of adolescent learners in Nigeria during the school suspension.

The present study examines two students' online learning outcomes during the school suspension, namely students' online learning self-efficacy and acquisition of digital skills. Online learning self-efficacy refers to students' beliefs in their capacity for online learning. It is positively related to students' learning outcomes, including satisfaction of online learning, the intention of continuing online learning, and knowledge acquisition (Bates and Khasawneh, 2007; Hodges, 2008; Shen et al., 2013; Alqurashi, 2016). In light of the implementation of home-based online learning due to the pandemic-induced school suspension, students' learning has become more dependent on their families (Gupta and Jawanda, 2020; Middleton, 2020). Indeed, some studies show that parents' engagement and high expectations positively impact students' online learning self-efficacy (Vekiri and Chronaki, 2008; Hsiao et al., 2012). However, these studies were conducted before COVID-19 when parents had the discretion to decide whether to enroll their children in online learning programs and they can adequately prepare themselves to support their children's online learning (Beck et al., 2014; Curtis and Werth, 2015). In the case of mandatory online learning during the pandemic-induced school suspension, many parents are ill-prepared to assume new responsibilities such as helping their children to stay focused and navigate online learning platforms (ElSaheli-Elhage, 2021;

Weaver and Swank, 2021). Therefore, research needs to examine the relationship between parental involvement and students' online learning outcomes in these different circumstances.

In summary, the present study will address the (third) research gap pertaining to the influence of parental involvement on students' socioemotional well-being and online learning outcomes. The students' socioemotional well-being variables comprise their cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension and worries for school resumption while the online learning outcomes comprise students' online learning self-efficacy and acquisition of digital skills.

## Present Study

The overall aim of the present study is to examine relationships among SES, parental involvement, and student outcomes during the first wave of school suspension in Hong Kong in 2020. The specific aims are to (a) identify a typology of parental involvement based on variations in their home and school involvement; (b) clarify how SES is associated with different patterns of parental involvement; and (c) compare levels of student outcomes associated with the different patterns of parental involvement using matched data from students and their parents collected in Hong Kong (conceptual framework in **Figure 1**).

Hong Kong is an interesting context for the present study for two reasons. First, Hong Kong is characterized by high levels of social inequality (Kwan and Wong, 2016), so it is important to ascertain whether there are differences in the pattern of parental involvement among parents of different SES during the pandemic. Second, students in Hong Kong have experienced multiple waves of school suspension since early 2020 as the city implements various measures to contain the community spread of the virus, so it is important to understand what aspects of parental involvement can enhance students' online learning and mitigate the adverse effects of changing to this learning modality.

The students were sampled from primary and secondary schools. Thus, this study is able to compare the relationships among SES, parental involvement, and students' outcomes for these two groups of students. This comparison between primary and secondary students is important because students' developmental needs evolve as they grow up; curricular expectations and educational aims differ with grade levels; and parents may adapt their involvement to address the different learning needs of their children (Hill and Tyson, 2009; Castro et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2019).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sample

Matched parent<sup>1</sup>-child data from primary and secondary schools were analyzed in this study. The sample comprised primary school students and secondary school students as well as their parents who participated in the eCitizen Education 360 survey

designed to collect data on students' learning experiences during school suspension due to COVID-19 in Hong Kong. The primary school sample comprised 186 Primary 3–6 students from 13 primary schools (38.17% from Primary 3–4; 61.83% from Primary 5–6) and their parents. The gender distribution of the primary students was 48.39% boys and 51.61% girls. The primary school students had a mean age of 10.80 years ( $SD = 1.04$ ; range = [8, 14]). The parents' educational attainment differed widely (17.20% junior secondary or below; 48.39% senior secondary/diploma; 11.29% associate degree/higher diploma; 19.90% Bachelor's degree; 6.98% Master's degree or above). The majority of these parents were aged 36–45 years (64.52%) with the rest aged 19–25 years (0.54%), 26–35 years (9.14%), 46–55 years (23.66%), and 56 years and above (2.15%). The secondary school sample comprised 932 students (66.31% from Secondary 1–3; 33.59% from Secondary 4–6; 33.59% from 23 secondary schools and their parents. There were more girls (71.46%) than boys (28.43%) in the secondary student sample (0.11% missing data). The secondary school students had a mean age of 14.97 years ( $SD = 1.58$ ; range = [11, 19]). The parents' educational attainment of the secondary students was also diverse (21.89% junior secondary or below; 33.91% senior secondary/diploma; 10.09% associate degree/higher diploma; 21.35% Bachelor's degree; 12.34% Master's degree or above; 0.43% missing data). The majority of these parents were aged 46–55 years (52.90%) with the rest aged 19–25 years (0.75%), 26–35 years (1.39%), 36–45 years (37.45%), and 56 years and above (7.08%); missing values (0.43%).

### Measures

Three indicators were used to measure SES (adapted from OECD, 2017). The first indicator was computed using student data on whether they had three types of general home resources (desk for study, own room, quiet place to study; *Yes* or *No*). The second indicator measuring the availability of home learning resources was computed using two-parameter logistic model and the graded response model in item response theory for student data on (a) the number of books at home [five-point response scale from *None or very few (0–10 books)* to *Enough to fill three or more bookcases (more than 200 books)*]; and (b) whether they had access to five types of digital learning resources at home (desktop computer, laptop/portable computer, tablet, smartphone, Internet; *Yes* or *No*). The third indicator, parental education, was obtained from parental data on their educational attainment (five-point response scale; *Junior secondary or below* to *Master's degree or above*).

Parental involvement was measured using parents' responses to nine questions (adapted from OECD, 2017). Four questions asked about the frequency to which parents were involved in different home involvement practices (four-point scale; from *Never* to *Always*):

- Parent-child communication before the school suspension (three items; e.g., "I discussed with my child what he/she has learnt in school"); and
- Parental monitoring of children's online activities during the school suspension (three items; e.g., "I controlled my

<sup>1</sup> Respondents to the parent survey could be parents or guardians. A large majority of the responses came from parents (98.92% in primary school sample and 96.57% in secondary school sample).

child's screen time when he/she was using digital devices"); and

- Parental help with homework during the school suspension (three items; e.g., "I helped my child with his/her online homework");

Parents also responded to another question (four items) on their perceptions of how the pandemic affected the parent-child relationship (e.g., "I have understood my child's ability more") using a five-point scale (*Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*); items.

Four other questions asked about the frequency with which parents were involved in different school involvement activities (four-point scale; from *Never* to *Always*):

- Parent-teacher interactions before the school suspension (four items; e.g., "I discussed my child's schoolwork/grades/scores with a teacher on my own initiative");
- Parental participation in school activities before the school suspension (three items; e.g., "I attended a scheduled teacher-parent meeting");
- Parent-teacher interactions during the school suspension (four items; e.g., "I discussed my child's schoolwork/grades/scores with a teacher on my own initiative"); and
- Parental participation in school activities during the school suspension (four items; e.g., "I participated virtually in activities related to parenting organized by the school").

Separate confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), conducted in the programming environment R using *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012), for primary and secondary student samples showed that all items significantly loaded on their intended parenting variables,  $p < 0.01$  (Tables 1, 2). The CFA model fit ( $CFI = 1.00$ ,  $0.00 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.01$ ) and scale reliabilities ( $0.71 \leq \Omega \leq 0.95$ ) were satisfactory. Factor scores of the nine parenting variables were used in the analysis.

Student outcomes were measured using student responses to four questions on their:

- Cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension (three items adapted from Garnefski and Kraaij's (2007) *Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire*; e.g., "I thought about how I could best cope with the situation") using a five-point scale (*Never* to *Always*);
- Worries about school resumption (six items developed by the project team; e.g., "I cannot catch up with my schoolwork") using a five-point scale (*Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*);
- Online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension (six items adapted from Muris' (2001, 2002) academic self-efficacy subscale; e.g., "I could finish my homework on time") using a five-point scale (*Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*); and
- Acquisition of digital skills during the school suspension (three items developed by the project team; e.g., "Learned new digital skills useful for my academic studies") using a four-point scale (*Not at all* to *To a large extent*).

Confirmatory factor analysis shows that all items significantly loaded on the intended student outcome variables,  $p < 0.01$  (Tables 3, 4). The CFA model fit was satisfactory ( $0.97 \leq CFI \leq 1.00$ ;  $0.00 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.07$ ). Scale reliabilities ( $\Omega$ ) were 0.56, 0.74, 0.75, and 0.84 for students' cognitive-emotional regulation, worries about school resumption, online learning self-efficacy, and acquisition of digital skills, respectively. Scale reliabilities were satisfactory for the secondary student sample ( $0.71 \leq \Omega \leq 0.82$ ). Factor scores of these student outcome variables were used in the analysis.

## Procedure

The eCitizen Education 360 survey was administered during June-July 2020 when schools resumed briefly after 4 months of suspension. Survey data were collected from school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and the e-learning coordinator from each participating school. All schools in Hong Kong were invited to participate in the survey on a voluntary basis. The schools that came on board made decisions, based on their needs and administrative resources, on the specific grade levels and numbers of classes to participate in the survey. Parents of the participating students were invited to complete the parent survey. For the purposes of this study, only matched parent-child data from primary and secondary schools were analyzed. Various aspects of the study, including project details (e.g., study objectives, elements of research methodology that involved human participants) and data-collection (e.g., data sources, recruitment of study participants, risk assessment, informed consent, data-retention) were reviewed and approved by the research team's university Human Research Ethics Committee.

## Analytical Strategy

The present study employed the three-step LPA (Vermunt, 2010; Asparouhov and Muthén, 2013; Oberski, 2016), using MPlus, to unravel the relationships among family SES, parental involvement, and student outcomes (Figure 1). In the first step, we fitted a measurement model using the nine parenting indicators. In the second step, we ascertained the measurement errors associated with the latent profiles. In the third step, we used the SES indicators as predictors of latent profile membership and compared levels of the student outcomes among the profiles.

## RESULTS

In the sections that follow, LPA results for the matched parent-child sample for primary schools are presented before those for the secondary schools in this section.

### Primary Student Sample

Different model indicators were used to determine the number of latent profiles (Nylund et al., 2007). First, for the matched parent-child primary school sample, the analysis (Table 5) shows that the information criteria improved when the number of profiles was increased from one to five. However, the likelihood ratio tests indicated that the four-profile solution did not differ significantly from the three-profile solution. The entropy was high for all the



**TABLE 1 |** CFA for parenting variables (primary schools).

| Variables                                                                    | Items      | Factor loadings (SE) | CFI  | RMSEA | Reliability ( $\alpha$ ) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------------|------|-------|--------------------------|
| Parent-child communication before school suspension                          | par_Q16_11 | 0.74** (0.08)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.92                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q16_12 | 0.98** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q16_13 | 0.94** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental monitoring of children's online activities before school suspension | par_Q16_8  | 0.78** (0.06)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.91                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q16_9  | 1.00** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q16_10 | 0.82** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental monitoring of children's online activities during school suspension | par_Q7_7   | 0.71** (0.06)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.87                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q7_8   | 1.00** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q7_9   | 0.76** (0.05)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental help with homework during school suspension                         | par_Q7_1   | 0.64** (0.08)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.71                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q7_2   | 0.52** (0.09)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q7_3   | 0.84** (0.07)        |      |       |                          |
| Parent-child relationship during school suspension                           | par_Q11_1  | 0.81** (0.07)        | 1.00 | 0.01  | 0.81                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q11_2  | 0.71** (0.09)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q11_3  | 0.70** (0.08)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q11_4  | 0.54** (0.08)        |      |       |                          |
| Parent-teacher interactions before school suspension                         | par_Q17_1  | 0.95** (0.02)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.95                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_2  | 0.82** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_3  | 0.96** (0.01)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_4  | 0.82** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental participation in school activities before school suspension         | par_Q17_5  | 0.78** (0.10)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.82                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_6  | 0.84** (0.06)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_7  | 0.68** (0.07)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_9  | 0.74** (0.06)        |      |       |                          |
| Parent-teacher interactions during school suspension                         | par_Q8_1   | 0.81** (0.05)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.87                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_2   | 0.54** (0.08)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_3   | 0.89** (0.08)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_4   | 0.70** (0.06)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental participation in school activities during school suspension         | par_Q8_5   | 0.61** (0.10)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.81                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_6   | 0.84** (0.10)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_8   | 0.67** (0.10)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_10  | 0.70** (0.09)        |      |       |                          |

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

profiles (0.74–0.85). The percentage of parents in profiles 1 to 3 in the three-profile solution ranged from 27.96 to 43.01% whereas the percentage for profile 4 in the four-profile solution was only 2.69%. Therefore, a three-profile solution (27.96%, 43.01%, and 29.03% of parents in profiles 1–3, respectively) was used to characterize the parents in the primary student sample.

Profile 1 parents were named *Low-engagement* parents because they had the lowest mean levels for most of the home involvement variables (except parent-child relationship during school suspension) and school involvement variables during the school suspension (Table 6). In contrast, profile 2 parents had the highest mean levels for most of the home involvement variables (except parental monitoring) and all of the school involvement variables, so they were named *Comprehensive-Support* parents. Profile 3 parents were named *Home-Monitoring-and-Support* parents to reflect their higher levels of monitoring of children's online activities and relatively high levels of parent-child communication and parental help with children's homework and lowest levels for most of the school involvement variables.

The three SES indicators (general and home learning resources, parental education) were used to predict parents'

membership in the typology. Results (Table 7) show that none of the SES indicators predicted parents' membership in the typology at the 0.05 level (with *Comprehensive-Support* parents (profile 2) used as the reference group for comparison). Table 8 presents the levels of student outcomes associated with the four profiles. Pairwise comparisons of profile means of student outcomes (Table 9), conditional on average SES levels, show that students with profile 2 parents had the lowest whereas students with profile 3 parents had the highest mean level of online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension. There were no other significant differences in mean levels of the other three student outcomes (acquisition of digital skills, cognitive-emotional regulation, worries about school resumption) among students associated with the different profiles at the 0.05 level.

## Secondary Student Sample

Next, results for the matched parent-child secondary school sample are presented. The analysis (Table 10) shows that the information criteria improved when the number of profiles was increased from one to six. However, the likelihood ratio tests indicated that the five-profile solution did not differ significantly

**TABLE 2 |** CFA for parenting variables (secondary schools).

| Variables                                                                    | Items      | Factor loadings (SE) | CFI  | RMSEA | Reliability ( $\alpha$ ) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------------|------|-------|--------------------------|
| Parent-child communication before school suspension                          | par_Q16_11 | 0.85** (0.02)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.93                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q16_12 | 0.95** (0.01)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q16_13 | 0.91** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental monitoring of children's online activities before school suspension | par_Q16_8  | 0.76** (0.02)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.90                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q16_9  | 0.98** (0.01)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q16_10 | 0.85** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental monitoring of children's online activities during school suspension | par_Q7_7   | 0.72** (0.02)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.72                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q7_8   | 0.96** (0.01)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q7_9   | 0.86** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental help with homework during school suspension                         | par_Q7_1   | 0.67** (0.03)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.89                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q7_2   | 0.51** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q7_3   | 0.83** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
| Parent-child relationship during school suspension                           | par_Q11_1  | 0.81** (0.02)        | 1.00 | 0.01  | 0.84                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q11_2  | 0.77** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q11_3  | 0.78** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q11_4  | 0.76** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
| Parent-teacher interactions before school suspension                         | par_Q17_1  | 0.91** (0.01)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.88                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_2  | 0.84** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_3  | 0.94** (0.01)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_4  | 0.79** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental participation in school activities before school suspension         | par_Q17_5  | 0.74** (0.04)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.87                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_6  | 0.91** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_7  | 0.8** (0.02)         |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q17_9  | 0.75** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
| Parent-teacher interactions during school suspension                         | par_Q8_1   | 0.87** (0.02)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.89                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_2   | 0.78** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_3   | 0.97** (0.01)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_4   | 0.82** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
| Parental participation in school activities during school suspension         | par_Q8_5   | 0.66** (0.04)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.85                     |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_6   | 0.79** (0.05)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_8   | 0.79** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                                              | par_Q8_10  | 0.86** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

from the four-profile solution. The entropy was high for all the profiles (0.82–0.87). The percentage of parents in profiles 1 to 4 in the four-profile solution ranged from 11.27 to 36.05% whereas the percentage for profile 5 in the five-profile solution was only 2.25% (21 parents). Therefore, a four-profile solution (36.05%, 28.54%, 24.14%, and 11.27% of parents in profiles 1–4, respectively) was used to characterize the parents in the secondary student sample.

Profile 1 parents were named *Low-engagement* parents because they had the lowest mean levels of home and school involvement variables among the four profiles (Table 11). In contrast, profile 4 parents had the highest mean levels of parental home and school involvement variables, so they were named *Comprehensive Support* parents. Profile 2 parents were named *Balanced-Home-and-School-Support* parents because they were, on balance, involved both in school and at home. Profile 3 parents were named *Home-Monitoring-and-Support* parents to reflect their higher levels of home monitoring and support when compared to profile 2 parents.

The three SES indicators were used to predict parents' membership in the typology. Results (Table 12) showed that, when compared to profile 4 (*Comprehensive-Support* parents), parents with more home learning resources were 1.89 times more likely to belong to profile 3,  $p < 0.05$ . General home resources and parental education did not predict membership in the typology at the 0.05 level. Table 13 presents the levels of student outcomes associated with the four profiles. Pairwise comparisons of profile means of student outcomes (Table 14), conditional on average SES levels, show that students with profile 2 parents had the lowest mean levels for cognitive-emotional regulation, online learning self-efficacy, and acquisition of digital skills, and the highest mean level of worries about school resumption. Students with profiles 3 and 4 parents had the highest mean levels for cognitive-emotional regulation, online learning self-efficacy, and acquisition of digital skills. Additionally, students with profile 3 parents had the lowest mean level of worries about school resumption.

**TABLE 3 |** CFA for student outcome variables (primary schools).

| Variables                                                   | Items | Factor loadings (SE) | CFI  | RMSEA | Reliability ( $\Omega$ ) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------|----------------------|------|-------|--------------------------|
| Cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension | Q8_1  | 0.66** (0.06)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.56                     |
|                                                             | Q8_2  | 0.26** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q8_3  | 0.68** (0.07)        |      |       |                          |
| Worries about school resumption                             | Q1a_1 | 0.55** (0.03)        | 0.99 | 0.03  | 0.74                     |
|                                                             | Q1a_3 | 0.70** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q1a_5 | 0.69** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q1a_6 | 0.46** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q1b_1 | 0.58** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
| Online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension  | Q7_1  | 0.60** (0.03)        | 1.00 | 0.04  | 0.75                     |
|                                                             | Q7_2  | 0.79** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q7_3  | 0.75** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q7_4  | 0.48** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
| Acquisition of digital skills during the school suspension  | Q6_1  | 0.73** (0.02)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.84                     |
|                                                             | Q6_2  | 0.74** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q6_3  | 0.91** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .**TABLE 4 |** CFA for student outcome variables (secondary schools).

| Variables                                                   | Items | Factor loadings (SE) | CFI  | RMSEA | Reliability ( $\Omega$ ) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------|----------------------|------|-------|--------------------------|
| Cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension | Q9_1  | 0.45** (0.05)        | 1.00 | 0.00  | 0.71                     |
|                                                             | Q9_2  | 0.69** (0.05)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q9_3  | 0.85** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
| Worries about school resumption                             | Q1_1  | 0.65** (0.03)        | 0.97 | 0.06  | 0.73                     |
|                                                             | Q1_3  | 0.75** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q1_5  | 0.62** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q1_6  | 0.49** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q1_7  | 0.51** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q1_10 | 0.50** (0.04)        |      |       |                          |
| Online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension  | Q8_1  | 0.55** (0.03)        | 0.98 | 0.07  | 0.82                     |
|                                                             | Q8_2  | 0.74** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q8_3  | 0.52** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q8_4  | 0.81** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q8_5  | 0.79** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q8_7  | 0.57** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
| Acquisition of digital skills during the school suspension  | Q7_1  | 0.80** (0.02)        | 0.99 | 0.04  | 0.77                     |
|                                                             | Q7_2  | 0.62** (0.03)        |      |       |                          |
|                                                             | Q7_3  | 0.88** (0.02)        |      |       |                          |

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .**TABLE 5 |** LPA model fit indicators (primary schools).

| No. of latent profiles | Information criteria |         |                   | % change |      |                   | $p$ for likelihood ratio tests |              |           | Entropy |
|------------------------|----------------------|---------|-------------------|----------|------|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------|---------|
|                        | AIC                  | BIC     | $n$ -Adjusted BIC | AIC      | BIC  | $n$ -Adjusted BIC | LMR                            | Adjusted LMR | Bootstrap |         |
| 1                      | 3863.45              | 3921.52 | 3864.50           | –        | –    | –                 | –                              | –            | –         | –       |
| 2                      | 3698.82              | 3789.14 | 3700.46           | 4.26     | 3.38 | 4.24              | 0.01                           | 0.01         | 0.00      | 0.74    |
| 3                      | 3595.08              | 3717.66 | 3597.30           | 2.80     | 1.89 | 2.79              | 0.04                           | 0.04         | 0.00      | 0.80    |
| 4                      | 3542.27              | 3697.10 | 3545.07           | 1.47     | 0.55 | 1.45              | 0.40                           | 0.41         | 0.00      | 0.85    |
| 5                      | 3501.37              | 3688.46 | 3504.76           | 1.15     | 0.23 | 1.14              | 0.25                           | 0.25         | 0.00      | 0.85    |

**TABLE 6 |** Descriptives for parenting variables (primary schools).

|                                                                              | M(SE) in latent profiles                          |                                                          |                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                              | 1. <i>Low-engagement</i> parents (n = 52; 27.96%) | 2. <i>Comprehensive-Support</i> parents (n = 80; 43.01%) | 3. <i>Home-Monitoring-and-Support</i> parents (n = 54; 29.03%) |
| <b>Home involvement</b>                                                      |                                                   |                                                          |                                                                |
| Parent-child communication before school suspension                          | 3.04** (0.17)                                     | 3.77** (0.07)                                            | 3.69** (0.11)                                                  |
| Parental monitoring of children's online activities before school suspension | 2.61** (0.19)                                     | 3.84** (0.08)                                            | 4.06** (0.20)                                                  |
| Parental monitoring of children's online activities during school suspension | 2.58** (0.17)                                     | 3.82** (0.09)                                            | 3.84** (0.20)                                                  |
| Parental help with homework during school suspension                         | 2.65** (0.14)                                     | 3.38** (0.09)                                            | 3.03** (0.12)                                                  |
| Parent-child relationship during school suspension                           | 3.39** (0.09)                                     | 3.55** (0.08)                                            | 3.27** (0.11)                                                  |
| <b>School involvement</b>                                                    |                                                   |                                                          |                                                                |
| Parent-teacher interactions before school suspension                         | 2.29** (0.09)                                     | 3.02** (0.09)                                            | 1.90** (0.10)                                                  |
| Parental participation in school activities before school suspension         | 1.80** (0.12)                                     | 2.65** (0.11)                                            | 1.71** (0.11)                                                  |
| Parental participation in school activities during school suspension         | 2.38** (0.11)                                     | 3.07** (0.08)                                            | 1.88** (0.13)                                                  |
| Parent-teacher interactions during school suspension                         | 1.33** (0.06)                                     | 1.99** (0.09)                                            | 1.33** (0.07)                                                  |
| Parental participation in school activities during school suspension         | 3.04** (0.17)                                     | 3.77** (0.07)                                            | 3.69** (0.11)                                                  |

\*\*p &lt; 0.01.

## DISCUSSION

Results from the present study are discussed in this section. Specifically, the discussion will focus on three aspects, namely nuanced patterns of parental involvement for both the matched parent-child primary and secondary school samples, parental monitoring and support in homes with more learning resources, and plausible benefits of parental home monitoring and support for students' socioemotional well-being and online learning during the school suspension in Hong Kong.

First, the present study finds that there were typologies of parental involvement during the pandemic-induced school suspension when teaching and learning was taken online in Hong Kong. The typologies comprised three categories of parents for the matched parent-child primary school sample (*Low-engagement*, *Comprehensive-Support*, *Home-Monitoring-and-Support*) and four categories of parents for the matched parent-child secondary school sample (*Low-engagement*, *Balanced-Home-and-School Support*, *Home-Monitoring-and-Support*, *Comprehensive-Support*). The typologies indicate that parents are not necessarily highly involved or totally uninvolved in their children's learning. Instead, they can have different combinations of home and school involvement practices, possibly to address their children's learning needs. These results add to an emerging body of studies illustrating the value of using latent class/profile analysis to unravel the complexity in parenting during the pandemic. For example, Pratama and Firmansyah's (2021) identified a typology of parents varying in their attitudes toward students' home learning (*Disengaged*, *Positive*, *Negative*) in Indonesia. Martin-Storey et al. (2021) found that there were four latent profiles of Canadian adolescents varying in their perceptions of change in family relationship quality (*Low Change*, *Improvement Only*, *Moderate Instability*, *High Instability*).

Second, the present study shows that, among the three SES indicators examined, only the indicator "home learning resources" was positively associated with membership in the

parenting typology for the secondary student sample. Specifically, parents whose secondary school children reported having more learning (not general) resources were more likely to be monitoring and supporting their children's online learning. In contrast, non-learning-related SES indicators (e.g., general home resources, parental education) were not predictive of membership in the typology for both primary and secondary student samples. Home general resources may be indicative of the economic aspects of family SES whereas home learning resources reflect parents' priority given to learning resources. The former is less amenable to school interventions whereas schools can provide parental education programs aimed at supporting families' effective use of home educational resources for student learning.

The results suggest that parents who are involved at home may procure more learning resources to address their older children's learning needs. The availability of home learning resources also enables parents to plan and structure effective learning activities for their children (Chen C. Y. C. et al., 2022). More fundamentally, the availability of home learning resources may indicate that parents have more positive attitudes toward students' home-based online learning (Pratama and Firmansyah, 2021), and therefore, these parents may have higher levels of monitoring of and support for their children's online learning.

Another set of results from the present study shows that, compared to peers associated with other parental latent profiles, primary school students of *Home-Monitoring-and-Support* parents had the highest levels of online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension. These results suggest that parental monitoring and support serves a protective function for students' online learning during the pandemic. This finding adds to the nuanced findings in the literature on associations between parental monitoring and student learning (Patall et al., 2008; Hill and Tyson, 2009). For example, Patall et al. (2008) found that parental homework help was positively associated with the achievement of elementary and high school students



**TABLE 7 |** SES and latent profile membership (primary schools).

|                                                                | Logits       | Odds ratio |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Latent profile 1 ( <i>Low-engagement</i> parents)              |              |            |
| General home resources                                         | −0.51 (0.32) | 0.60       |
| Home learning resources                                        | 0.10 (0.33)  | 1.10       |
| Parental education                                             | −0.03 (0.21) | 0.97       |
| Latent profile 3 ( <i>Home-Monitoring-and-Support</i> parents) |              |            |
| General home resources                                         | 0.35 (0.32)  | 1.42       |
| Home learning resources                                        | 0.50 (0.40)  | 1.66       |
| Parental education                                             | 0.30 (0.19)  | 1.34       |

Reference category is latent profile 2 (*Comprehensive-Support* parents).

**TABLE 8 |** Descriptives for of student outcomes (primary schools).

|                                                             | Latent Profiles                    |                                              |                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
|                                                             | 1 <i>Low-engagement</i><br>parents | 2<br><i>Comprehensive-Support</i><br>parents | 3 <i>Home-Monitoring-and-Support</i><br>parents |
|                                                             |                                    | M(SD)                                        |                                                 |
| Cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension | −0.14 (0.60)                       | 0.05 (0.75)                                  | 0.00 (0.82)                                     |
| Worries about school resumption                             | 0.09 (0.71)                        | −0.10 (0.80)                                 | −0.22 (0.66)                                    |
| Online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension  | 0.04 (0.68)                        | −0.07 (0.66)                                 | 0.26 (0.52)                                     |
| Acquisition of digital skills during the school suspension  | −0.08 (0.7)                        | −0.08 (0.69)                                 | 0.07 (0.75)                                     |

Means indicated are factor scores of student outcomes.

**TABLE 9 |** Comparison of student outcomes (primary schools).

|                                                                    | Mean difference (SE) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension</b> |                      |
| Profile 1 – Profile 2                                              | −0.19 (0.13)         |
| Profile 1 – Profile 3                                              | −0.13 (0.14)         |
| Profile 2 – Profile 3                                              | 0.04 (0.13)          |
| <b>Worries about school resumption</b>                             |                      |
| Profile 1 – Profile 2                                              | 0.19 (0.13)          |
| Profile 1 – Profile 3                                              | 0.31 (0.15)          |
| Profile 2 – Profile 3                                              | 0.12 (0.13)          |
| <b>Online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension</b>  |                      |
| Profile 1 – Profile 2                                              | 0.12 (0.11)          |
| Profile 1 – Profile 3                                              | −0.21 (0.12)         |
| Profile 2 – Profile 3                                              | −0.33** (0.11)       |
| <b>Acquisition of digital skills during the school suspension</b>  |                      |
| Profile 1 – Profile 2                                              | 0.00 (0.13)          |
| Profile 1 – Profile 3                                              | −0.15 (0.14)         |
| Profile 2 – Profile 3                                              | −0.15 (0.13)         |

Conditional means (with SES covariates as controls) used in computing differences between latent profiles.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

but not for middle school students' achievement. They also reported that parental homework help was positively associated with students' verbal achievement but negatively associated with students' mathematics achievement.

Parental monitoring and support is particularly important for primary school students' online learning during the pandemic-induced school suspension. This is because these younger

students may have difficulties completing distance learning tasks at home due to lack of learning interests and limitations of home learning environments (Lau and Lee, 2021). Consequently, parents can play an important role by being teachers, autonomy-supportive coaches, and interveners (Knopik et al., 2021). Spear et al. (2021) provided additional insights from teachers' perspectives on what parents need to do to monitor and support

**TABLE 10 |** LPA model fit indicators (secondary schools).

| No. of latent profiles | Information criteria |          |                | % change |       |                | p for likelihood ratio tests |              |           | Entropy |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|----------------|----------|-------|----------------|------------------------------|--------------|-----------|---------|
|                        | AIC                  | BIC      | n-adjusted BIC | AIC      | BIC   | n-adjusted BIC | LMR                          | Adjusted LMR | Bootstrap |         |
| 1.                     | 20533.42             | 20620.49 | 20563.33       | —        | —     | —              | —                            | —            | —         | —       |
| 2.                     | 18936.34             | 19071.78 | 18982.86       | 7.78%    | 7.51% | 7.69%          | 0                            | 0            | 0         | 0.87    |
| 3.                     | 18193.47             | 18377.29 | 18256.61       | 3.92%    | 3.64% | 3.83%          | 0                            | 0            | 0         | 0.84    |
| 4.                     | 17886.97             | 18119.16 | 17966.72       | 1.68%    | 1.40% | 1.59%          | 0.04                         | 0.03         | 0         | 0.82    |
| 5.                     | 17629.14             | 17909.71 | 17725.50       | 1.44%    | 1.16% | 1.34%          | 0.11                         | 0.11         | 0         | 0.83    |
| 6.                     | 17420.44             | 17749.38 | 17533.42       | 1.18%    | 0.90% | 1.08%          | 0.11                         | 0.11         | 0         | 0.85    |

**TABLE 11 |** Descriptives for parenting variables (secondary schools).

|                                                                              | M(SE) in latent profiles                    |                                                                |                                                           |                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                              | 1. Low-engagement parents (n = 336; 36.05%) | 2. Balanced-Home- and-School Support parents (n = 266; 28.54%) | 3. Home-Monitoring- and-Support parents (n = 225; 24.14%) | 4. Comprehensive-support parents (n = 105; 11.27%) |
| <b>Home involvement</b>                                                      |                                             |                                                                |                                                           |                                                    |
| Parent–child communication before school suspension                          | 2.64** (0.07)                               | 3.22** (0.06)                                                  | 3.57** (0.08)                                             | 3.68** (0.09)                                      |
| Parental monitoring of children's online activities before school suspension | 1.64** (0.04)                               | 2.55** (0.13)                                                  | 3.34** (0.09)                                             | 3.57** (0.11)                                      |
| Parental monitoring of children's online activities during school suspension | 1.56** (0.04)                               | 2.44** (0.14)                                                  | 3.21** (0.08)                                             | 3.56** (0.13)                                      |
| Parental help with homework during school suspension                         | 1.95** (0.04)                               | 2.54** (0.07)                                                  | 2.65** (0.06)                                             | 3.09** (0.09)                                      |
| Parent–child relationship during school suspension                           | 3.12** (0.05)                               | 3.39** (0.05)                                                  | 3.43** (0.05)                                             | 3.55** (0.08)                                      |
| <b>School involvement</b>                                                    |                                             |                                                                |                                                           |                                                    |
| Parent–teacher interactions before school suspension                         | 1.46** (0.05)                               | 2.40** (0.07)                                                  | 1.60** (0.09)                                             | 3.17** (0.12)                                      |
| Parental participation in school activities before school suspension         | 1.46** (0.04)                               | 2.19** (0.09)                                                  | 1.71** (0.08)                                             | 3.12** (0.13)                                      |
| Parent–teacher interactions during school suspension                         | 1.35** (0.04)                               | 2.24** (0.07)                                                  | 1.53** (0.10)                                             | 3.07** (0.13)                                      |
| Parental participation in school activities during school suspension         | 1.16** (0.02)                               | 1.68** (0.07)                                                  | 1.27** (0.05)                                             | 2.68** (0.18)                                      |

\*\*p &lt; 0.01.

**TABLE 12 |** SES and latent profile membership (secondary schools).

|                                                                     | Logits       | Odds ratio |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Latent profile 1 ( <i>Low-engagement</i> parents)                   |              |            |
| General home resources                                              | −0.16 (0.22) | 0.85       |
| Home learning resources                                             | −0.10 (0.25) | 0.91       |
| Parental education                                                  | −0.13 (0.12) | 0.88       |
| Latent profile 2 ( <i>Balanced Home-and-School-Support</i> parents) |              |            |
| General home resources                                              | −0.22 (0.24) | 0.80       |
| Home learning resources                                             | −0.46 (0.27) | 0.63       |
| Parental education                                                  | −0.14 (0.14) | 0.87       |
| Latent profile 3 ( <i>Home-Monitoring-and-Support</i> parents)      |              |            |
| General home resources                                              | 0.17 (0.24)  | 1.18       |
| Home learning resources                                             | 0.64* (0.28) | 1.89       |
| Parental education                                                  | −0.17 (0.14) | 0.84       |

Reference category is latent profile 4 (*Comprehensive-support* parents).

\*p &lt; 0.05.

primary school students' learning during the pandemic-induced school suspension. Specifically, teachers expected parents to enable students' access to learning resources provided by teachers and participate in or supervise the completion of learning activities assigned by teachers. When parents monitor

and support their children's learning, they also benefit from this commitment. This is evident in Akinrinmade et al.'s (2021) study which found that parents of primary school students in Nigeria acknowledged that the extra time they spent together with their children during the pandemic-induced

**TABLE 13 |** Descriptives for of student outcomes (secondary schools).

|                                                             | Latent profiles                 |                                                                 |                                                            |                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
|                                                             | 1.<br>Low-engagement<br>parents | 2. <i>Balanced-<br/>Home-and-<br/>School-Support</i><br>parents | 3. <i>Home-<br/>Monitoring-and-<br/>Support</i><br>parents | 4.<br><i>Comprehensive-<br/>Support</i><br>parents |
|                                                             |                                 |                                                                 | M(SD)                                                      |                                                    |
| Cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension | −0.03 (0.48)                    | 0.00 (0.46)                                                     | 0.04 (0.5)                                                 | 0.01 (0.52)                                        |
| Worries about school resumption                             | 0.01 (0.53)                     | −0.01 (0.51)                                                    | −0.08 (0.56)                                               | −0.04 (0.51)                                       |
| Online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension  | −0.02 (0.52)                    | 0.08 (0.47)                                                     | 0.09 (0.52)                                                | 0.18 (0.49)                                        |
| Acquisition of digital skills during the school suspension  | −0.04 (0.58)                    | 0.09 (0.56)                                                     | 0.09 (0.64)                                                | 0.12 (0.62)                                        |

Means indicated are factor scores of student outcomes.

**TABLE 14 |** Comparison of student outcomes (secondary schools).

|                                                                    | Mean difference (SE) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension</b> |                      |
| Profile 1 – Profile 2                                              | 0.38** (0.08)        |
| Profile 1 – Profile 3                                              | −0.24** (0.07)       |
| Profile 1 – Profile 4                                              | −0.09 (0.08)         |
| Profile 2 – Profile 3                                              | −0.62** (0.06)       |
| Profile 2 – Profile 4                                              | −0.47** (0.09)       |
| Profile 3 – Profile 4                                              | 0.15 (0.09)          |
| <b>Worries about school resumption</b>                             |                      |
| Profile 1 – Profile 2                                              | −0.41** (0.08)       |
| Profile 1 – Profile 3                                              | 0.27** (0.09)        |
| Profile 1 – Profile 4                                              | 0.07 (0.08)          |
| Profile 2 – Profile 3                                              | 0.68** (0.06)        |
| Profile 2 – Profile 4                                              | 0.49** (0.08)        |
| Profile 3 – Profile 4                                              | −0.19* (0.09)        |
| <b>Online learning self-efficacy during the school suspension</b>  |                      |
| Profile 1 – Profile 2                                              | 0.46** (0.09)        |
| Profile 1 – Profile 3                                              | −0.34** (0.09)       |
| Profile 1 – Profile 4                                              | −0.24** (0.08)       |
| Profile 2 – Profile 3                                              | −0.79** (0.06)       |
| Profile 2 – Profile 4                                              | −0.70** (0.09)       |
| Profile 3 – Profile 4                                              | 0.10 (0.09)          |
| <b>Acquisition of digital skills during the school suspension</b>  |                      |
| Profile 1 – Profile 2                                              | 0.45** (0.12)        |
| Profile 1 – Profile 3                                              | −0.36** (0.08)       |
| Profile 1 – Profile 4                                              | −0.23** (0.09)       |
| Profile 2 – Profile 3                                              | −0.81** (0.09)       |
| Profile 2 – Profile 4                                              | −0.68** (0.12)       |
| Profile 3 – Profile 4                                              | 0.13 (0.10)          |

Conditional means (with SES covariates as controls) used in computing differences between latent profiles.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

school suspension enabled them to improve the parent–child relationship and spend time discussing moral development and discipline with their children.

The benefits of parental home monitoring and support are even greater for secondary school students. Specifically, our results show that, compared to peers associated with other latent profiles of parents, secondary school students of *Home-Monitoring-and-Support* parents had the highest levels of

acquisition of digital skills, had the highest levels of cognitive-emotional regulation and self-efficacy in online learning, and were the least worried about school resumption during the school suspension. Parents who commit time and resources to monitor and support their children's learning are better able to understand their children's learning needs. For example, Demir and Demir's (2021) study found that elementary and secondary school students in Turkey had lower levels of motivation (because

of Internet connection problems and social isolation) during the pandemic-induced school suspension, so parents played an important role by ensuring that their children followed the online lessons and motivating their children. In the process of monitoring and providing support, parents had a better understanding of their children's education and appreciated the value of their children's schooling. Tarsuslu et al. (2021) reported that almost half of the parents in their sample in Turkey indicated that spending time at home with their children during the pandemic-induced school suspensions strengthened their relationships with their children and the majority of parents perceived that the time spent together at home with their children enabled them to take better care of their children.

In contrast to these results alluding to the plausible benefits of parental involvement (particularly home monitoring and support), our analysis shows that primary students from the three parental latent profiles (*Low-engagement*, *Comprehensive-Support*, *Home-Monitoring-and-Support* parents) did not differ in their perceived acquisition of digital skills and cognitive-emotional regulation during the school suspension and worries about school resumption. There are no apparent reasons for this pattern of findings. However, the different patterns of results between the primary and secondary school samples underscore the importance for research on familial influences (SES, parental involvement) and student outcomes to consider contextual factors (e.g., students' grade levels or age) (Tan et al., 2019). Previous studies suggest that, compared to secondary school students, primary school students may be more dependent on parental interventions and therefore, parents need to work harder to understand their children's developmental and learning needs, cultivate a positive parent-child relationship, and be more proactive in their parenting (Knopik et al., 2021; Lau and Lee, 2021; Spear et al., 2021). Future research can expand the scope of investigation of parenting influences beyond parental involvement to identify aspects of parenting that can enhance the online learning of primary students during school suspension.

## CONCLUSION

The present study unravels complex relationships among SES, parental involvement, and learning outcomes for 186 primary and 932 secondary school students and their parents during the prolonged period of COVID-19-related school suspension in Hong Kong. The three-step LPA found different patterns of associations among these variables for the primary and secondary school samples. For the primary school sample, students' SES did not predict membership in the parental involvement typology, but students whose parents provided more home monitoring and support had the highest level of online self-efficacy. As for the secondary student sample, students whose parents provided more home monitoring and support tended to have access to more home learning resources and they had the highest levels of online self-efficacy, acquisition of digital skills, and cognitive-emotional regulation, and were the least worried about school resumption.

These results contribute to theory and practice in three ways. First, it underscores the importance of elucidating nuanced

patterns of parental involvement for students from different grade levels (Tan, 2018; Martin-Storey et al., 2021; Pratama and Firmansyah, 2021). Indeed, the results show that the typology of parental involvement practices differed between the matched parent-child primary and secondary school samples, and there were different levels of student outcomes among various parent latent profiles and between the primary and secondary school samples. The second contribution is the identification of *Home-Monitoring-and-Support* parents as the most plausible latent profile of parents that provides a protective function for students' home-based online learning during the pandemic-induced school suspension. Secondary school students associated with this latent profile had the highest levels of online learning (online learning self-efficacy, acquisition of digital skills) and socioemotional well-being (cognitive-emotional regulation, least worries about school resumption) while primary school students associated with this latent profile had the highest level of online learning self-efficacy. These results are important because they indicate that some aspects of parental involvement (e.g., home monitoring and support) may be more beneficial than others for student learning during the challenging times of school suspension. Therefore, parents can consider how they can devote more of their limited energy, time, and material resources to provide quality monitoring and support as opposed to other parental involvement activities. Lastly, the present study points the way forward for schools to support parents during future school suspensions. School psychologists and mental health professionals can develop intervention programs to enable parents to effectively monitor and support students' home online learning (Anderson et al., 2021; Hatzichristou et al., 2021). These programs are critical to optimize student well-being and online learning during future school suspensions due to pandemics (including COVID-19) or other compelling reasons. They contribute to the development of resilient education systems that are more fit-for-purpose in future contingencies.

Results from the present study have to be read with three limitations in mind. The first limitation is that the data was cross-sectional, so the results should not be taken to be evidence of causal relationships. Second, only three indicators (parental education, home general and educational resources) were used to measure SES, so there may be other patterns of SES-parental involvement associations if parental occupational status and family income were included as SES indicators. Third, the present study focused only on specific aspects of students' online learning (self-efficacy, acquisition of digital skills) and socioemotional well-being (cognitive-emotional regulation during school suspension, worries about school resumption). There are other aspects of student outcomes that are not investigated in the present study.

Moving forward, researchers can include more SES indicators (beyond parental education and home resources) to provide a comprehensive examination of the association between SES and parental involvement in students' home-based online learning during the pandemic-induced school suspension. There is also a need for research to investigate how different parenting styles can moderate the influence of parental involvement in supporting students' online learning. Furthermore, researchers can examine

# Parents' Involvement in Distance Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to determine how parents are involved in distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research used survey method by distributing research questionnaires using google form. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with the sample criteria being parents who have children aged 3-6 years. The questionnaire was distributed online through application Whatsapp . From 39 parents it was found that 57% of parents were at the undergraduate level of education. The results showed as many as 25 respondents or 83% of parents were in the good category in their involvement in accompanying children during distance learning. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the involvement of parents in distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic was in a good category.

**Keywords:** Parental Involvement, Distance Learning, Covid-19 Pandemi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since it was determined that covid-19 was a world pandemic, WHO asked all countries to immediately take steps to prevent the transmission of covid-19. Covid-19 is an infectious disease that was first discovered in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Covid-19 attacks the respiratory tract which causes respiratory infections such as pneumonia, MERS, and SARS. The Indonesian government's efforts in preventing the transmission of Covid 19 through the appeal of President Joko Widodo's policy by implementing Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB), Social Distancing or Physical Distancing which appeal to all Indonesians to work from home, learn from home, and worship from home (Nurhalimah , 2020) .

The Covid-19 pandemic caused upheaval in almost all sectors, such as the economy, social, culture and education around the world, such as the closure of offices, schools, universities, air, land and sea transportation stops and the closure of shopping centers. In the education sector, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, through a circular issued on March 24, 2020, stated that during the Covid-19 emergency period, learning at all levels of education from early childhood education to college was carried out at home or online . Educational activities such as administration, evaluation, admission of new students and other educational activities are also carried out

online. This policy was carried out to break the chain of spreading covid-19 (Minister of Education and Culture Circular Letter No.4 of 2020 concerning education policies during the emergency period of the spread of Covid-19, 2020).

Various government efforts in preventing the transmission of covid-19 certainly have a significant impact on all aspects of children's lives. UNICEF appeal the government to realize that Covid-19 pandemic has impacts on children's health, welfare, development and future. Children who do not understand about Covid-19 can experience mental disorders because they are depressed and feel excessive fear. Therefore, parents must be sensitive if their children have shown signs of experiencing stress and must take immediate action (UNICEF, 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, children and their parents must be at home continuously. The learning alternative chosen during the COVID-19 emergency is online learning. Online learning has been carried out almost all over the world. Online learning is a distance learning process by utilizing internet-based digital media that is able to support the learning process without physical contact between teachers and students, that can make boredom and stress on children, even parents. Parents must have a way to reduce children's boredom



while at home. Parents need to pay attention to children's psychosocial needs (Rohayani, 2020).

The implementation of distance learning for the early childhood education level and kindergarten cannot be carried out independently by children without the assistance of parents. Early childhood requires direct involvement of parents as companions and guides to participate in a series of distance learning. Parents are expected to be able to guide children to learn from home and replace the role of teachers at school. Starting from providing learning facilities in the form of internet -based digital media, until learning management at home must be managed by parents. Therefore, the importance of the role and guidance of parents in achieving distance learning goals.

Current conditions in the field indicate that distance learning which is carried out at home with the guidance of parents, encountered several obstacles. Such as the parents' lack of understanding of the material, difficulties in growing interest and motivation to teach the child, limited time to accompany the child to learn because they have to work, lack of patience in teaching children at home, lack of facilities and the difficulty of using gadget and Internet connection services. This raises the saturation and the desire of parents to the institution to immediately conduct face-to-face meetings at school as usual.

The results of research by Lilawati (2020) regarding the role of parents in supporting learning at home during the pandemic state that during distance learning, parents help and guide in the work of assignments given by the teacher and learning facilities at home are not more profitable for students when compared to facilities. learning in school according to some parents. Based on the background and previous research, this research is very important to find out how the parents' involvement in accompanying children by distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 2. METHOD

The method used in this research is a survey method, where primary data collection is done by distributing research questionnaires to respondents. The research questionnaire was in the form of questions about parental involvement in distance learning. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with sample criteria are parents who have children aged 3-6 years. The consideration is that at the age of 3-6 years, usually children are at the preschool or kindergarten level who not been able to carry out distance learning independently without parental assistance.

Due to pandemic conditions, a questionnaire was created using Google Form and distributed online via WhatsApp. The distribution of questionnaires was carried out for four days from 9 September 2020 to 12

September 2020 with 39 respondents obtained. The questionnaire instrument in the form of 9 items included the provision of facilities, mentoring time, material understanding, activity management, use of media to the feelings of parents while accompanying children. in distance learning. The assessment of the questionnaire items used a Likert scale, which is often, sometimes, never. Data processing using Microsoft Excel program. The qualifications for the range of values to involve parents in distance learning will be presented in table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Value Range of Parental Involvement in Distance Learning

| Score  | Qualification  |
|--------|----------------|
| 91-100 | Very good      |
| 75-90  | Well           |
| 60-74  | Pretty good    |
| 40-59  | Not good       |
| <40    | Very Less Good |

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The latest parental education data obtained from the results of filling out the questionnaire is 17% at the junior high school level or as many as 5 respondents, 47% at the senior high school or vocation school level or as many as 14 respondents, 57% at the bachelor level or as many as 17 respondents, and 10% at the magister level or as many as 3 respondents.

Based on the data, it can be concluded that the parents' education level is at the S1 higher education level. The percentage of parents' latest education can be seen in Figure 1 below.

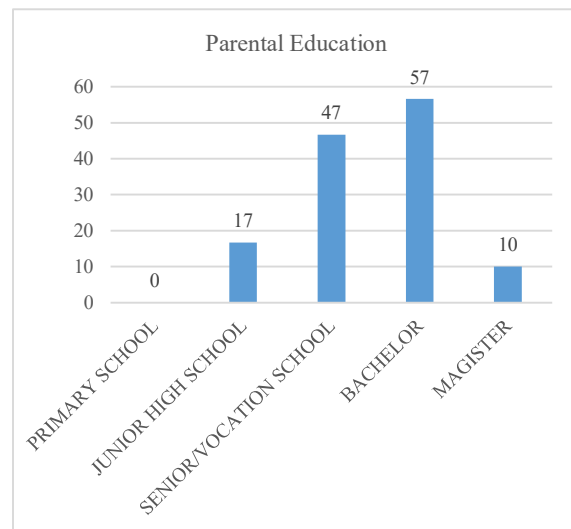


**Figure 1** Percentage of Parents' Latest Education.

The level of parental education affects the continuity of children's education. The mindset and educational orientation given to their children will be influenced by the level of education of the parents.



**Table 2.** Percentage of Parental Involvement During Distance Learning

| No. | Aspect                                                                                                                         | Average (%) |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1   | Provision of facilities and infrastructure in the form of mobile phones and Internet service coverage during distance learning | 1.01        |
| 2   | Granting permission to play outside the home during the Covid 19 pandemic                                                      | 0.82        |
| 3   | Take the time to accompany the child during distance learning                                                                  | 1.08        |
| 4   | Fostering children's interest in learning at home                                                                              | 1.04        |
| 5   | Assistance in carrying out school assignments                                                                                  | 1.02        |
| 6   | Understanding of learning material by parents                                                                                  | 1.04        |
| 7   | Management of children's play and learning at home                                                                             | 0.9         |
| 8   | Utilization of various learning media                                                                                          | 0.97        |
| 9   | Degree of parent saturation during distance learning                                                                           | 0.89        |

The higher the education of parents, the more open parents think about education and how to educate their children (Novrinda et al., 2017). The results of data collection on the parents' involvement in long-distance learning during the Covid 19 pandemic can be seen in table 2. Table 2 shows that the highest average parental involvement is taking the time to accompany children during distance learning.

Meanwhile, the involvement of parents in managing children's play and learning schedules is in the lowest rank, with an average percentage of 0.9. This means that the management of children's play and learning at home still needs to be improved. Parents must make an agreement with their children about daily hours related to play, study, rest, and other activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, which means that children spend more time at home.

The role of parents during the Covid-19 pandemic in general is to become educators, mentors and supervisors as well as providers of a sense of security and comfort when children are at home. The condition when children gather with family has a higher intensity than just activities at home during the pandemic. Based on the research results, it was found that the percentage of children's play and learning activity management at home only reached 0.9%. This shows that there are limitations for parents in providing play and learning activities to children at home during the pandemic period which can have an impact on the emergence of children's boredom at home. These findings are in line with Gloria's research (2020) which states that activities carried out only at home will cause boredom and make children fussy, so that the readiness of parents is very important in dealing with fussy children, of course starting from the ability of parents to deal with their own boredom.

The qualification data for parental involvement in this study were obtained from the results of filling out a questionnaire on parental involvement with 39 respondents. The frequency distribution of parental involvement data can be seen in table 3. Based on Table 3 it is known that there are 8 respondents or 27% are in the very good category, while as many as 25 respondents or 83% are in the good category, and 5 respondents or 17% are in the quite good category, 3% or 1 respondent is included in the unfavorable category, and there were

no respondents in the very unfavorable category. The percentage regarding parental involvement in distance learning can be seen in Figure 2.

**Table 3.** Frequency Distribution of Parents' Involvement in Distance Learning

| Score  | Category       | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 91-100 | Very good      | 8         | 27         |
| 75-90  | Well           | 25        | 83         |
| 60-74  | Pretty good    | 5         | 17         |
| 40-59  | Not good       | 1         | 3          |
| <40    | Very Less Good | 0         | 0          |
|        | Total          | 39        |            |

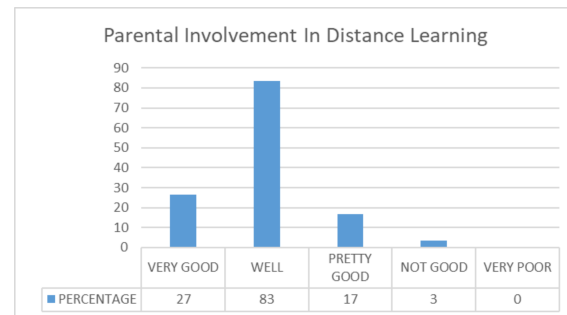


**Figure 2** Percentage of Parents' Involvement in Distance Learning.

In Figure 2 it is known that the majority of parental involvement in distance learning is categorized as good. This is known from the acquisition of a higher percentage in the good category, which is 83%. It can be concluded that the involvement of parents in distance learning falls into the good category.

School is a second home for children, where children feel comfortable, fun, full of meaning and warm. At school, children can freely socialize with their friends, teachers, school guards, sellers in the canteen and anyone else in the school environment. However, during the current pandemic, children can only dream of being able to play with their friends and explore new things together at school. Research by Sari et al (2020) states that during the Covid-19 pandemic, children tend to be fussy because they don't go to school and feel missing their friends and teachers.

Based on the results of research on the parents' involvement in distance learning in the aspect of taking

time to accompany children, getting the highest percentage compared to other aspects is 1.08%. Since the implementation of work from home, parents spend more time with their children. This makes it easy for parents to take the time to assist children in learning and playing. Many parents agree that they are the ones who help their children complete tasks from school. The influence of the role of parents on the application of distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic is very high. This is in line with Lilawati's research (2020) which states that the influence of parents as a motivator to foster children's motivation and interest in learning is the most visible.

Judging from the latest education data of parents, in general parents are very well educated, namely 57% at undergraduate level. With the high educational background of parents, the use of gadgets and internet services is not a significant problem. This is in accordance with Sari et al.'s (2020) research regarding the readiness of mothers to play with their children during the Covid-19 pandemic "at home", which states that with a high educational background, internet access and use of gadget are very easy for parents. For them, the internet is a means of finding educational and parenting references as well as a source of reference for designing media or playing activities with children at home.

The results of the research which states that the involvement of parents in distance learning is in the good category also cannot be separated from the level of parental understanding of the learning material. The results of the study on the aspects of parental understanding of the learning material obtained a percentage of 1.04. This shows that the learning material provided by the teacher can be understood and mastered well by parents. So that assistance in the learning process at home can be said to be good. In line with the research of Irma et al (2019) which states that the understanding of material and broad thoughts that parents have is very useful to help the learning process at home. Parents must understand well the learning material from schools, so that the implementation of education at home can be successful (Wardani & Ayryza, 2020).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and analysis that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the involvement of parents in distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic is categorized as good with a percentage of 83%. The results showed that the level of education of the parents was also categorized as good because 57% of parents were at the higher education level. This affects the provision of learning facilities such as the use of gadgets and internet services and the

understanding of learning materials. During the Covid-19 pandemic, in general parents, Because the application of work from home parents can spend more of their time accompanying children to study or just play. Parents can also foster motivation and interest in children's learning well, but they have enough problems with children's boredom when they are at home continuously which causes children to be fussy.

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# Importance and Types of Parental Involvement in Education

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**How to cite this paper:** Oranga, J., Matere, A. and Nyakundi, E. (2023) Importance and Types of Parental Involvement in Education. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10: e10512. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1110512>

**Received:** July 16, 2023

**Accepted:** August 22, 2023

**Published:** August 25, 2023

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## Abstract

Studies indicate that parental participation and involvement in education has a positive influence on a child's academic outcomes. This article, thus, explores the significance, types and components of parental involvement in education in an effort to enlighten stakeholders on the role of parents in their children's education. Accordingly, the benefits of parental involvement in education include: fewer behavioral problems amongst learners, better school attendance, increased academic achievement, better adaptation at school, better acquisition and demonstration of social skills, development of a strong feeling of self-worth and the development of a lifelong love for learning. Additionally, parental involvement helps build suitable school environments for children to thrive in and also helps cultivate good relations between teachers and parents. Consequently, the components and types of parental involvement in education include: volunteering at school, guiding home-based learning, constant communication with the school, participating in school decision-making processes, provision of learning resources, creation of safe home environments for children (environments that encourage learning at home) and modelling/encouraging good behavior. This article paid close attention to these components in an attempt to enlighten parental participation in education with reference to Joyce Epstein's parental involvement framework.

## Subject Areas

Sociology of Education

## Keywords

Benefits, Importance, Types, Parental Involvement, Education

## 1. Introduct

A parent is one who gives birth, nurtures or raises a child. Consequently, a parent is a man or woman who takes on all the parental responsibilities towards a child. This could also be a stepmother, an adoptive father, or a child's relative (Virasiri, Yunibhand, Chaiwawat, 2011) [1].

On the other hand parenting refers to raising children from infancy to adulthood, in an environment of nurturance (Virasiri, Yunibhand, Chaiwawat, 2011) [1]. Similarly Epstein (2010) [2], contends that parenting is the rearing of children and in particular the care, guidance and love given by a parent to a child. Accordingly, parenting is the single largest variable implicated in children's education, substance misuse, truancy, school disruption, under-achievement in class and juvenile crime.

As a result, parents have an important role to play in the upbringing and modelling of their children's behaviour as children stay at home with the parents much longer than at school and also due to the fact that children have more in-family interaction than schooling (Epstein, 2010) [2].

## 2. Significance and Importance of Parental Involvement in Education

A growing body of research suggests that when parents collaborate with the school effectively, students learning outcomes improve (Meadan, *et al.* 2014 [3], Fan & Chen, 2001 [4]). Dixon (2008) [5], describes parental involvement in education as a combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and to the student. Accordingly, parental involvement, in almost any form, produces positive measurable gains in students' achievement.

Furthermore, numerous studies indicate that the more parents participate in their children's education in a sustained manner, at every level, including in advocacy, decision making, school fundraising, volunteering, acting as para-professionals and as home teachers, the more student's achievement improves (Sakaue, Wokadala & Ogawa, 2023) [6]. Similarly, Reinke (2013) [7] contends that parental involvement helps meet parental information needs concerning their children's education, meet parents' emotional needs, use parents as change agents and becomes a source of information regarding the student, at school. Accordingly, parents who avail books and other learning resources, make time to read for their children, guide television watching, take trips with their children, provide stimulating experiences and monitor behavior contribute to their children's academic achievement. Consequently, parents should complement teachers' efforts by exposing the children to practical learning environments like visiting museums, game parks or agricultural production or manufacturing firms as this would enrich learning and provide vivid education experiences for children (Griffin & Steen 2010) [8]. Hence, in order to provide suitable education, the involvement of parents both at school and at home is imperative.

Similarly, Fan and Chen (2001) [4] contend that parental involvement has a

positive influence on students' academic performance and is also an important ingredient for the remedy of many problems in education. Moreover, according to the authors, one fundamental way in which parents can transmit the cultural value of education is by becoming involved in their children's schooling.

Fan and Chen (2001) [4] further indicate that parental involvement in education rotates around three main constructs, these are: supervision, communication and parental expectation.

Several studies also suggest that parental support, involvement, encouragement, and positive reinforcement are all well-linked to children's learning competence, healthy social relations, a strong feeling of self-worth and fewer behavioral problems (Griffin & Steen, 2010 [8]; Oranga, Obuba & Boinett, 2022) [9]. The studies also contend that parental involvement helps cultivate good relations between teachers and parents and helps build a more suitable school environment for children to thrive in.

Additionally, parental engagement and collaboration ensures that parents help with continuity and practice at home of skills learnt at school (Oranga, Obuba, Sore & Boinett, 2022) [10]. Consequently the authors indicate that when parents are adequately involved in their children's education, they act as a source of information regarding students' progress and challenges that students' encounter at home, necessitating the need for parents to adequately participate in their children's education.

However, despite the numerous benefits that accrue from parental involvement and participation in education, a study by Fan and Chen (2001) [4] reveals that parents have lost the original teaching function, thereby impacting negatively on their children's schooling and learning. Accordingly, parents have become distant observers in their children's learning process, necessitating the need to explore the components of parental participation in education with the ultimate goal of enhancing parental involvement in education. The following section thus elaborates on the different components and ways through which parents can participate in their children's education as postulated by Epstein (2003 [11], 2011 [12], 2010 [2] & 2017 [13]).

### **3. Components of Parental Involvement in Education as Postulated by Joyce Epste**

Epstein (2011 [12]; 2010 [2]) indicates that there are many reasons for establishing partnerships between the school, family and community at large. Accordingly, the main reasons are enhancing learners' academic outcomes, enhancing school programmes and school climate, developing leadership and parental skills and helping parents and entire families to connect with others in the community and school. Hence the components of parental involvement, as derived from varied studies by Epstein (2003 [11], 2011 [12], 2010 [2] & 2017 [13]) are thus presented in **Figure 1**.

As shown in **Figure 1**, in accordance with Epstein (2011) [11], parental involvement in education should encompass volunteering, home based learning,

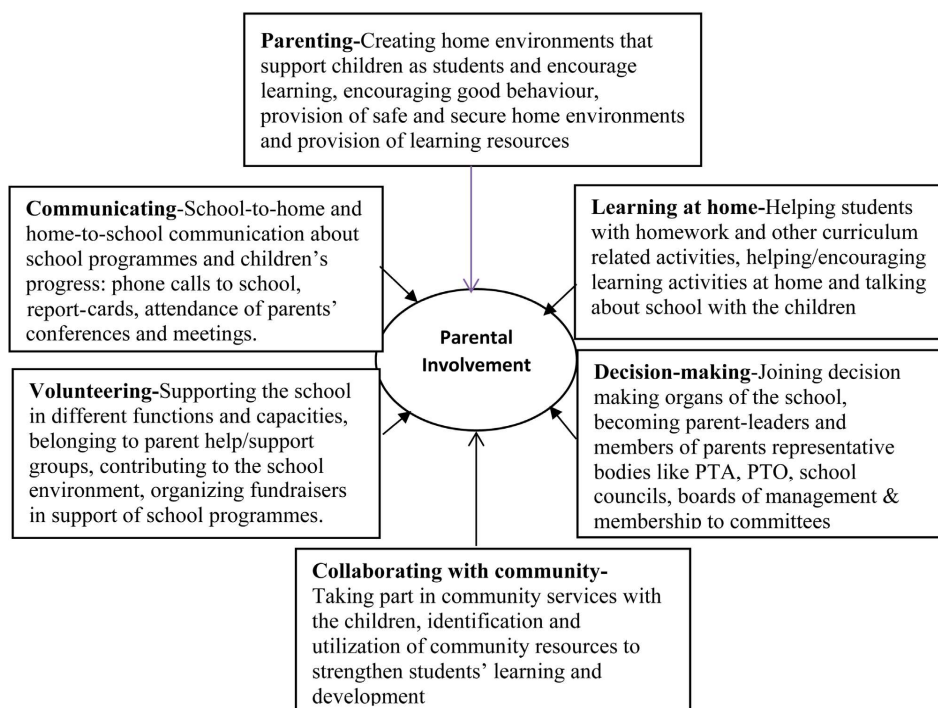


**Figure 1.** Diagrammatic summary of parental involvement components as postulated by Epstein (2003 [11], 2011 [12], 2010 [2] & 2017 [13]).

communicating with the school, participating in school decision making and creation of safe home environments that also encourage learning, modelling good behavior and provision of learning resources. On the other hand, volunteering includes: supporting schools during different functions/capacities, belonging to parent help/support groups, contributing to the environment and organizing fundraisers in support of school programmes. Accordingly, communicating involves: school-to-home or home-to-school communication (about school programmes and children's progress), phone calls, report cards, attendance of parents' conferences and meetings and talking about school with the children.

Furthermore, Epstein (2011 [12], 2010 [2]), suggests that parents should join decision making organs of the schools, becoming parents' leaders and members of parents' representative bodies like parents' teachers' associations/organisations (PTA/O), school councils, committees and boards of management. Additionally, the author advocates for parental collaboration and engagement in the community that involves participation in community services with the children and identification and utilization of community resources to strengthen students' learning and development. This article paid attention to these components in an attempt to establish the significance and importance of parental involvement in education. Further elaborations on the components are thus provided in the subsequent sections of this article.

### 3.1. Parenting

This type of involvement influences a child's learning and development at home.



This includes all that parents engage in to raise healthy, happy children who become capable at school (Sakaue, *et al.*, 2023 [6]; Oranga & Guangying, 2019 [14]). Accordingly, parents should strive to offer positive and secure home environments. Furthermore, according to Epstein (2010 [2]), parenting involves nurturing and instilling positive attributes and values in learners. Schools may offer support and assistance to parents to ensure that they create positive home environments that enable students to thrive and grow. This would eventually result in enhanced school outcomes for the children.

### 3.2. Home-School Communicat

When parents, schools and communities communicate effectively the parents get to understand what is expected of the students and how to help and support their social and academic development at home (Herman, *et al.*, 2012 [15]). Further, a two-way communication between the school and the home is vital to student's success (Haisraeli, & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2023 [16]). Teachers and school support staff are required to communicate regularly with parents about students via email, class letters, telephone and newsletters. Communicating involves school-to-home/home-to-school communication about school programmes and children's needs and achievements.

Parents also require the opportunity to communicate their concerns and worries with the educators. Epstein (2010) [2] recommends that families with language barriers should have translation assistance provided to them as effective communication ensures that everyone understands school policies and decisions adequately, ultimately leading to maximum cooperation between teachers and parents which subsequently leads to good educational outcomes (Epstein, 2010 [2]).

### 3.3. Volunteering

This is the third component of Epstein's parental participation framework. Accordingly, parental volunteering could help children to become aware of their many deep-seated talents, skills and occupations. Parent volunteers could help teach children different cultures and traditions through organized school exhibitions, oral history storytelling events and cultural fairs. Moreover, teachers might also solicit parental' voluntary help with special projects in the classrooms, class field trips or other relevant roles. Volunteering should encompass: supporting schools during different functions/capacities, belonging to parents' help/support groups, contributing to the environment and organizing fundraisers in support of school programmes. According to Epstein (2011) [12], parents can be a strong gold mine of skills and talents, which can be of tremendous help in the process of teaching young learners. Bringing parents into the school environment could consequently help students learn how to communicate and interact with adults and may give students a more one-on-one interaction and attention and help build their confidence while also stimulating the children's cognitive abilities. This, accordingly, would lead to enhanced learning outcomes.

### 3.4. Home Learning

According to Epstein's framework, when parents are provided with knowledge, ideas and skills to help children learn at home, they are better able to aid teachers in the teaching process. Epstein (2010) [2] suggest that schools could set up a regular schedule of homework requiring students and parents to discuss what students are learning in class. Subsequently, parents could be provided with specific examples and activities that they could engage in with the learners at home to aid their learning and development processes. Accordingly, such materials would need to be presented in an easy and understandable format and in the parents' native language. Educators could also make home visits to show parents how to engage with children in learning activities. According to Epstein (2011) [12], hosting a parents' seminar or workshop at the school may also prove useful for educating parents about how they can be of help with school matters.

According to Epstein (2010 [2], 2017 [12]), educators can help parents learn how to supervise homework, communicate their expectations for homework and support kids as they work on school work at home. Studies have always linked improved school scores to a more positive attitude towards homework and subsequently linked a positive attitude towards homework to an effective home-learning environment. Parents thus are expected to provide suitable and effective learning environments for their children at home, in a bid to improve their children's learning outcomes.

### 3.5. Decision-Making

Under this component, parents should participate in making important decisions in the school through membership in school decision making organs like Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) or school board of governors or management (BOG/Ms). Accordingly, by including parents in school decision-making organs, parent-friendly programmes would be developed. Consequently, children benefit from a reduction in behavioral issues and increase in school attendance. This ultimately leads to a more suitable and effective learning environment at school. Moreover, according to Epstein, newsletters could be used to keep parents updated and informed about changes and upcoming school events.

Furthermore, Epstein (2011) [12] suggests that questionnaires may be employed to rate parental satisfaction with school programmes and activities as questionnaires allow anonymity that is needed by parents in order to voice their opinions or suggestions for improvement in the school. Apparently, parental involvement in school decision-making activities may aid in achieving goals that help boost students' academic outcomes. Additionally, parental organizations may spearhead fundraisings and contributions that may eventually benefit the school and the students at large (Epstein, 2010) [2]. Thus, Epstein (2011) [12], suggests that parents join decision making organs of the schools, becoming parents' leaders and members of parents' representative bodies like parents' teachers' associations/organisations (PTA/O), school councils, committees and boards

of management.

### **3.6. Collaborating with Community**

This is the last component of the framework. Accordingly, schools can work cooperatively with parents and communities for activities that strengthen, enhance and develop learners. This is because integration of resources and services from the community into learning programmes may help strengthen students' learning and development.

Under this component, parents should help link and expose their children to the community and community recreational resources, cultural and athletic programmes as these provide important learning opportunities for their children. Consequently, students receive exposure to different experiences and opportunities, which assist with making choices in future educational opportunities and careers. Hence, parents should help with identification and utilization of community resources to strengthen students' learning and development (Epstein, 2017) [13].

## **4. Application of Epstein's Theory**

This framework could assist educators to develop and enhance school/parent partnerships, ultimately increasing the role that parents play in the education of their children at school, family and community level. Epstein's framework, strives to bring school, parents and community together in a positive manner. The structure also acts as a guide to educating and supporting parents in an effort to enhance their involvement in their children's education. This framework ultimately helps to establish strategies of enhancing parental involvement in education. Epstein's theory may also guide in the development of a parent's education programme that may enlighten parents on their role in their children's education. Furthermore, Epstein's framework is comprehensive and touches almost all areas of learning.

## **5. Critique of Epstein's Framework**

Evidently, Epstein's comprehensive parental involvement framework makes a lot more sense to parents in developed countries as opposed to those in developing ones as parents in developing countries, are yet to embrace the very basic aspects of parental involvement in their children's education like paying of school fees. However, it could be adopted as a guideline for a comprehensive parental involvement strategy/policy as it covers vital dimensions of parental participation and engagement in education.

To implement the parents' involvement framework as postulated by Epstein (2010) [2]) in developing countries, a lot of effort and financial resources would be required. The framework too does not recognise the fact that school factors like teachers' attitude, lack of proper teacher-training/in-service also form a barrier to parental participation in education. The framework also does not bring to

the fore parental involvement issues that focus on learners with disabilities but generalises all learners yet learners with disabilities have unique needs that may not be catered for adequately by a generalised framework.

## 6. Conclusio

Schools should work towards implementing parental participation and engagement activities and programmes that involve all parents. Furthermore, administrators and educators should provide an inviting environment in order to make the school less intimidating to parents that have previously had negative school experiences. Additionally, teachers should strive to make/establish contact with parents throughout the school year and not just when problems arise as this would strengthen home-school relations and parental participation and involvement in their children's education.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement: Voices of Role-Players in Secondary Schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa

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10.46303/ressat.2023.41

### Article Info

Received: June 20, 2023

Accepted: October 01, 2023

Published: December 18, 2023

### How to cite

Ndwandwe, N. D. (2023). Parental involvement and academic achievement: Voices of role-players in secondary schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 8(4), 237-256.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2023.41>

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### ABSTRACT

Parents are broadly acknowledged to be essential partners in the schooling process of their children, with parental involvement being linked to positive impact on academic achievement. Regrettably, poor parental involvement remains significant and an unfortunate challenge in South African schools, as well as a contributing factor to high failure rates in schools. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievements of learners in secondary schools in the Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga, using Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence as a theoretical lens. A qualitative research design underpinned by the interpretive paradigm was employed, using a sample of two secondary schools with a purposive sample of principals, teachers and parents. Data for the study was obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with the principals and through focus group discussions conducted with teachers and parents, respectively. The data was gathered through thematic analysis approach. The findings obtained reveal that parental involvement improves discipline and learner achievement. However, various factors hindered parent involvement, such as the lack of confidence in providing assistance to children with homework, conflicts in home-school scheduling, ineffective communication, and reluctance to attend parent meetings and to serve on governance structures. The study recommends that both teachers and parents should establish good home-school relationships, teacher training for parent involvement should be organised, with schools developing a parent involvement programme, so that a viable collaborative partnership can be established between school and home.

### KEYWORDS

Parental involvement; parents; academic achievement; learners; secondary schools.

## INTRODUCTION

The significance of parental involvement in children's education is well-documented worldwide (Hill, 2022; Mazikana, 2023; Mehta & Kaur, 2022; Schmid & Garrels, 2021; No single definition of the concept of parental involvement exists (Erdem & Kaya, 2020; Shute et al., 2011). In Grant and Ray's (2010) view, parental involvement is widely described as encompassing a broad range of all types of parental participation in children's education. Such involvement entails parents' attendance of school events and their responses to the school's obligations, providing continuous encouragement to children, creating study time and space for their child(ren), monitoring homework, serving as their role model by means of engaging in enjoyable reading activities and providing academic support to their children. According to El Nokali, Bachman and Votruba-Drzal (2010), the concept of parental involvement is viewed as involving various activities in which parents participate either at home or at school, and either directly or indirectly, so as to support the learning of their children, including in terms of their formal home-school relations, in relation to which both teachers and parents collaborate in supporting the interests of the child(ren) involved. Parental involvement also refers to parents utilising their resources to offer the needed support to their children's academic accomplishments (Thuba, Kathuri & Mariene, 2017). This involves the engagement of children in cognitively stimulating activities at home, ensuring that children are able to access a variety of community resources that enhance their schooling experiences or parenting activities, such as monitoring homework, television, and social activities (Harris & Goodall, 2008). These definitions demonstrate the multifaceted nature of parent involvement and indicate that the concept subsumes a wide variety of home-school activities and parenting practices (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018). However, while definitions of parent involvement may vary, researchers unanimously agree that when schools, families and community members collaborate to provide support for their children's education, the children involved tend to perform better academically, the level of school dropout is reduced and the children's positive behaviour and self-esteem are enhanced (Chemagosi, Odongo & Aloka, 2016; Epstein, 1987; Kibaara & Ndirangu, 2014).

In the South African context, after the first democratic election in 1994, deliberate prioritisation of parental involvement, as part of the education-transforming agenda, emphasised the need to make parents crucial partners in the education of their children (Msila, 2012). Prior to such reforms, the traditional role of parents as the primary educators in the home was stressed, while the teachers concerned were regarded as being responsible for offering formal education to children at school (Sibanda, 2021). In addition, the inherited, fragmented and racially divided education system of the apartheid period was blamed for weak parent involvement, particularly in the case of rural schools and communities (Matshe, 2014). However, the implementation of South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996) presented parents with a newfound possibility of actively being involved in their children's education and in school governance through mandatory parent representation



on School-Governing Bodies (SGBs). Thus, a system where parents should collaborate with teachers, so as to ensure the provision of quality education, was envisaged. Furthermore, in 2016, a handbook of guidelines for parental involvement in children's education, both at school and at home, was developed by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), in collaboration with the South African Department of Basic Education (Mavuso & Malahlela, 2022). Notwithstanding such endeavours, a gap still exists between policy and practice in terms of school–parent relationships, especially in rural South Africa (Matshe, 2014; Munje & Mncube, 2018; Sibanda, 2021). As a result, parental involvement in the nurturing of learners towards academic achievement, and their cooperation with the school, is minimal, with it largely contributing to children's poor performance at schools (Mbokodi, 2008).

Against the above-mentioned background, this paper reports on a study that examined the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of learners in rural secondary schools in the Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga, South Africa. This main research question was formulated as follows: How does parental involvement affect the academic achievement of learners in the selected schools? What are the experiences of the role-players concerned regarding parental involvement? What are the common barriers to parental involvement in schools? To address such questions, a qualitative inquiry explored parental involvement in the selected schools, using interviews as a method of gathering data from a small sample of purposively chosen principals, teachers and parents.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The qualitative inquiry was informed by the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which formed the theoretical framework for the study, which is postulated by Joyce Epstein (1987, 2018) of Johns Hopkins University, who is a global prominent scholar in the field of parental involvement. The theory involved suggests that academic achievement development is influenced by three interconnected settings, namely the family, the school and the community. According to Epstein (2018), such interconnection is known as the overlapping spheres of influence, due to the three contexts involved that influence the learners' development. Such research is founded on a similar principle, namely that effective families and schools share an overlapping goal when it comes to caring and developing their children (Epstein, 2018).

According to Epstein (1995), within the area of the overlap between families, school and community, a range of activities and interactions occurs. Instead of merely listing the diverse activities involved, as illustrated in the aforementioned definitions of parental involvement provided in the Introduction, she categorises related activities into a typology of six areas, or types, of parental involvement, known as Epstein's typology of family–school community relations. Type one, Parenting, includes parental cooperation with the school, through creation of a conducive learning environment at home. Parenting can also involve attending parents' meetings, ensuring that the children concerned are provided with the necessary resources that promote learning at home and the meeting of children's health,

nutritional and practical needs. The second type is Communication, in terms of which the parents regularly communicate with the teachers at school regarding the progress of the learner and school-related matters; likewise, the school is obliged to communicate regularly with the family in a form of two-way process. The third type, Volunteering, entails the parents demonstrating commitment to the participants, in terms of volunteering their time in supporting school activities and attending school events for the betterment of their children, without expecting to be compensated or rewarded for doing so. The fourth type is termed Learning at home, which includes the inputs of both working and nonworking parents, according to their circumstances, in relation to supporting children's learning at home with schoolwork, so as to reinforce the school curriculum. Their doing so provides the learners with an opportunity to discuss what they are learning and assists the family to keep abreast of the content that children are learning at school. It also encompasses informal learning, which concerns parents taking their children on excursions, making them aware of their environment and jointly accessing community resources, like libraries. The fifth type refers to Decision-making, which relates to schools involving parents in decision-making related to the curriculum and to the planning of their children's education. This extends beyond the formal membership of mandatory SGBs to the developing of parents as leaders and parents. Finally, the sixth type of parent involvement is termed Collaborating with the community, which refers to the idea that parents and community members can work together to support and enhance the educational experiences of children, by means of identifying and integrating resources and enlisting the services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and children's learning in its totality. Crosnoe and Ressler (2019) note that, within Epstein's typology, such factors as economics, education, time constraints, culture and socio-economic status shape the extent to which parents become involved.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of relevant literature was carried out to establish the effects of parental involvement on academic achievement and the barriers to parental involvement in schools.

### **Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement**

This section deals with the benefits of parental involvement for children's academic achievement. The concept of academic achievement is often presented as being synonymous with the academic performance, or level of attainment, attained in carrying out a task or assignment, or in completing a course (Onyedikachim & Ezekiel-Hart, 2021). Mehta and Kaur (2022) indicate that a learner's academic achievement refers to the amount of knowledge acquired during the process of learning at school, with such achievement most often tending to be defined by report cards and grades, attendance levels and improved behaviour, as well as promotion to the next grade.

The substantial body of research available on the topic tends to support the significant amount of impact that parents often have on their children's school-based academic

achievement (Ndwandwe, 2014) improved attendance levels (Rose, 2017) and sense of self-esteem (Garbacz, Herman, Thompson & Reinke, 2017). Nadenge (2015) reports the existence of a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and good parent–teacher relationships. In addition, the learners concerned reported that, when their parents were involved in their education, they felt supported and guided, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding their career paths, which led to their enhanced academic performance (Gil-Galván & Martín-Espinosa, 2023). Another study associated parental involvement with fewer child behaviour problems in schools than would probably otherwise have been the case (El Nokali et al., 2010). Harrington’s (2022) study found a strong positive relationship between the supervision of homework by parents and the level of academic achievement of the learners involved, particularly in terms of reading competency. Another study conducted in Mogadishu, Somalia concluded that there was a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement (Dahie, Mohamed & Mohamed, 2018). Parental involvement clearly significantly impacts on learners’ behaviour, academic achievement and homework-related performance.

### **Barriers to parental involvement**

Despite the widespread acknowledgment, among the relevant scholars, of the potential benefits that come from parents being actively engaged in their children’s education, noticeable gaps still exist between theory and parental involvement practice in schools (Cantu et al. 2021; Durmuşoğlu et al., 2022; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Munje & Mncube, 2018; Sibanda, 2021). According to, Gonzalez DeHass, Willems and Holbein (2005), the low income, or poor financial background, of families tends to hamper effective parental involvement, since the parents involved are then compelled to work extended hours or multiple jobs, which leads to them having less time for involvement at home to assist their children with homework. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) affirm that logistical issues among low economic status families can result in reduced opportunities for the parents involved to engage with teachers, to exchange information and to attend school events, due to their limited financial resources and the cost of transport, demanding work schedules, or the need to care for their other children. Similarly, Luxomo and Motala (2012) indicate that, in areas experiencing high level of poverty, such as, especially, the townships in South Africa, the prioritisation of income-engaging activities can lead parents to neglect their obligations to engage in their children’s education. Such neglect increases the burden placed on the teachers concerned, as they are then expected to produce good results without receiving full parental support (Bozhkova et al., 2020; Mampane, 2023; Singh et al., 2004). As a result of the above, teachers tend to voice their concerns about the poor level of parental involvement in their children’s education (Mapp, 2003), with the parents involved sometimes barely managing to collect their children’s progress reports, and to remain informed about what the child is doing, or whether they need to repeat a grade (Naicker, 2013).

Parents with a limited educational background level, or who are illiterate, tend to experience more hindrances when it come to their involvement in their children’s schooling

than do those who are educated (Oranga, Obuba & Boinnet, 2022). In Kimaro and Machumu's (2015) view, parents with a lower-level education and with an inadequate income tend to be preoccupied with survival strategies, with, as a result, many often having little time for becoming involved in school-related activities. The scheduling conflicts that can arise from work-school demands tend to pose competing demands on parents' time and on their availability for becoming involved in their children's education (Baker, 2000; DeLeon et al., 2022; Onwughalu, 2011). Such conflicts occur mostly among parents who are overcommitted to working double- or night-shift work. LaRocque, Kleiman and Darling (2011) underscore that parents with busy schedules and current life contexts can encounter reduced opportunities to be involved in the education of their children. Consequently, the parents' level of education determines the extent and level of their involvement in their children's education (Anderson & Minke, 2007), with it also serving as a decisive factor in their children's educational attainments (Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013). For example, Greenwood and Hickman (1991) underscore those parents who, themselves, did not complete secondary school can struggle with assisting their children with their homework, once they enter secondary school. In the same vein, Hornby and Lafaele (2011:43) affirm that it is common for parents without a university education to undermine their own value in terms of the need for them to work with their children's teachers, since they feel inferior to them and believe that the teachers are better qualified than they are to assist their own children. Otermans, Sharma and Aditya (2022) concur that poorly educated parents can avoid visiting their children's school, because of the stigma associated with illiteracy; basically, they do not feel confident to communicate with their children's teachers, as they feel that they are incompetent speakers of the language medium of the school concerned, which is often English. In this regard, Selolo (2018) suggests that school management should encourage collaboration with parents who are poorly educated by informing them of the value of their involvement, and explaining their constitutional obligation to become involved in, their children's education.

Ntekane (2018) revealed that, in South Africa, some parents choose not to engage themselves in their children's education, because they believe that the teachers know everything and are capable of handling all learner-related matters on their own; consequently, they tend to distance themselves from their children's education. In this regard, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) argue that it imperative for the schools concerned to offer support to the parents, because some parents have insufficient time and resources to manage on their own, and they need to develop their own skills, so that they can become able to assist their children with their schoolwork. Schools need to devise some strategies to assist the parents with lower educational levels, by means of assisting to enroll them in free adult basic education classes (Mbatha, 2018).

Several researchers blame teachers for contributing to poor parental involvement in their children's schooling by their disregarding the value of parent involvement (Adigun & Ndwandwe, 2022; Appiah-Kubi & Amoako, 2020; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Ndwandwe, 2014),

with such a phenomenon being especially prevalent among parents with low socio-economic status. Research also indicates that teachers might, due to the lack of time and resources, maintain some distance from parents, which can prevent them from becoming involved in their children's education (Boonk, Ritzen, Gijsselaers & Brand-Gruwel, 2021). Gonzalez-De Hass et al. (2005) concur that some teachers fear that the parents of their learners might criticise their teaching methods, curriculum-related decisions and classroom techniques, and interfere with their authority as teachers. Turney and Kao (2009), who conducted a United States-based study with low-income immigrant households, indicated that the parents concerned were unable to involve themselves in school matters, due to their own marginalisation, which was noticeable in terms of the teachers' hesitation to engage them as partners and their limited communication regarding issues pertaining to their children's performance and activities in school. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), such reluctance was blamed on the parents' and teachers' failure to understand each other's interests in children and schools. To address the problem, Epstein (2018) suggests improving communication with parents and training teachers to enable them to identify the parents' potential to forge partnerships for the benefit of the learners and schools concerned. The lack of teacher training is a recognised barrier to parental involvement in schools (Borup, 2016). The teachers' desire to promote parental involvement can be constrained by lack of skills and knowledge. Epstein (2018) affirms that very few teachers, prior to starting their profession, are knowledgeable about how to establish and implement partnership programmes, and about how to sustain the engagement of parents in their children's education throughout the entire school career. The following section presents the research methodology adopted in this study.

### **STUDY CONTEXT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Following on a brief outline of the study, the research methodology, data collection process and analytical framework are outlined. An account of how the participants were selected is also provided.

This study was conducted in the rural Ehlanzeni district located in eastern Mpumalanga province, South Africa, with low socio-economic status. The education system in Ehlanzeni faces various challenges, as is the case in many rural areas in the country. The challenge includes lack of infrastructure, a shortage of learning resources, a high dropout rate and other social challenges, like teenage pregnancy. Many schools also suffer from inadequate facilities, including libraries, laboratories and sports facilities. Furthermore, the Ehlanzeni District is plagued by a relatively high level of poverty and unemployment, which negatively impacts on the educational system at play.

The empirical enquiry employed a qualitative research methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which allowed the researcher to examine the phenomenon in terms of its natural setting, so as to be able to make sense of the experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), which, in the present instance, consists of the voices of stakeholders and their experiences of parental

involvement. A case study research design was adopted within the interpretivist paradigm (Babbie, 2017).

Two rural secondary schools were purposively selected, because they were among the schools where parental involvement was reported to be unsatisfactory. Thereafter, the researcher employed a purposive sampling method to select participants from the selected schools, with the aim of studying their experiences of parental involvement. The use of purposive sampling was deemed suitable for this study, because the researcher wanted to collect data from information-rich participants, who were considered to be knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013). The sample consisted of the school principal (N=2), five teachers (N=10) and six parents (N=12) from each of the two schools involved. The sample size of the study was determined by the complexity of the research problem, as well as by the issue of parental involvement and the availability of the parents.

In order to generate data for the research, two face-to-face data collection strategies were employed, consisting of semi-structured interviews (held with the principals) and focus group interviews (held with the parents and teachers). The interviews were advantageous, because they enabled the researcher to obtain reliable data on the experiences of, and the barriers to, parental involvement (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The researcher was familiar with the area, which is close to his hometown, with him having worked there during his previous employment as a teacher in a neighbouring school.

The main focus of the current study was to examine the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement, with the examination being guided by three questions: What are the effects of parental involvement in the academic achievement of learners? What are the experiences of the role-players regarding the issue of parental involvement in schools? Which barriers limit parents from being involved in the schools? The participants were invited to provide their insights and to share their personal experiences in accordance with the previous formulated research questions. After obtaining their consent, an electronic digital recording device was used to capture what they had to say. The semi-structured interviews held with the principals and the focus group interviews held with the teachers were conducted during school breaks and outside working hours, so as to minimise the amount of disruption of the regular school schedule. The focus group interviews held with the parents were conducted outside normal working hours at the schools concerned. Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

Data obtained from both the individual and the focus interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically through the coding and categorising employed in the inductive analysis method (Bless et al., 2013). So as to ensure the data trustworthiness, confirmability and credibility of the findings made, the analysis process was conducted rigorously. Thereafter, the researcher generated patterns of ideas, themes and categories, by means of thoroughly



examining the interview transcripts and continuously listening to the recorded voices of the participants, so as to be able to understand the topic of study.

The researcher observed all ethical procedures both prior to and throughout the data collection process. Ethics refers to a set of beliefs and values regarding what is considered to be either wrong or right from a moral perspective (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Ethical approval for the study was granted by the researcher's institution, being the University of South Africa (Unisa). The Mpumalanga Department of Education and school principals provided approval for accessing the schools. The selected participants were assured by the researcher that the information that they shared was strictly for research purposes. Prior to the interviews, the participants were assured of strict confidentiality, as stipulated in the consent form signed by both parties. The participants were duly informed of their entitlement to voluntary withdrawal from the study without prior notification and without incurring any penalty. The anonymity of each participant was assured by means of the use of codes. The principals were coded as SP1 and SP2, the teachers as T1:S1, T2:S1 and so on, and the parents as P1–10, with the identity of the schools involved not being disclosed.

### **FINDINGS and DISCUSSION**

This section presents a synopsis of the findings and of the three themes, based on the previously formulated research questions. A discussion and conclusion based on the findings follow. The three themes were: (a) the effect of parental involvement on the academic achievement of learners; (b) the experiences of the role-players regarding parental involvement in the schools; and (c) the barriers that limit parental involvement in the schools.

#### **The effect of parental involvement on the academic achievement of learners**

The findings suggest the existence of a positive relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of learners in schools. For example, one principal (P1) remarked that their school had experienced some progress in terms of learner achievement. Due to the parental involvement, the discipline at the school had improved, which had resulted in fewer behavioural problems. The above findings are noted in the following statements made by the participants:

"We always experience improvement of a learner's progress when parents are involved and lesser behavioural problems in our school." (Participant P1)

"I think there is greater relationship between the two. Children whose parents [are] involved tend to excel academically, because of knowing that their parents care. This I have noticed through the years of my profession." (Participant P2)

The findings also indicate that parental involvement tends to lead to improved test scores, a more positive school atmosphere than before and improved attendance. A teacher said:

"Parents' involvement greatly improves the academic performance of our learners; there is improvement in the learning for all. I will say higher test scores are one of the benefits

of this involvement. More than [that], our school [has] become better, [as] class attendance improves when parents are closer.” (Participant T1:S2)

The above findings confirm the findings made in Nadenge’s (2015) study, which reported the existence of a significant positive relationship between parental involvement, good parent–teacher relationships and academic performance. Similarly, Chemagosi, Odongo and Aloka (2016) found collaborative effort among school, family and community to enhance children’s learning always results in the improved academic performance of children, reducing the chances of dropout and children enjoying schooling. Likewise, Kibaara and Ndirangu (2014) found a remarkable boost in learners’ academic performance, when there is positive parental involvement in their academic journey. Such findings also concur with those made by Epstein (1987), who argues that children whose parents are significantly involved in their schooling tend to demonstrate higher-level achievement in comparison to those whose parents are minimally involved in their schooling. Furthermore, this finding is in keeping with the findings of Odchique, Ebcay and Quirap (2023), who affirm that children with engaged and active parents tend to remain in school for longer, and to produce higher academic results, than others do.

#### **Experiences of role-players regarding parental involvement**

The findings obtained in the current research indicate that parental attendance at school meetings in the selected schools was poor at the time of the study. The parents involved tended to attend such meetings when they were invited to hear good news, such as about their child’s good behaviour, or so as to fetch a certificate of excellence from their children’s teachers. Some parents complained about not receiving any correspondence, such as letters, because the children forget to give them the school correspondence. A parent said:

“Sometimes, when doing their washing, I will find some of these letters [too] late in their school uniform pockets.” (Parent 3)

However, the parents concerned mentioned that they provided guidance and support to their children regarding their homework and learning at home. Some of the parents mentioned the following:

“I sometimes try to give examples for the homework that he is writing, and then [I] let the child complete the rest of the work given.” (Parent 4)

“I don’t wish my children to grow and suffer like me, when they grow up, so I always tell them to read their books, and I also make sure that they write their homework [down] in order to succeed in life.” (Parent 3)

The above findings link to Grant and Ray’s (2010) assertion that the parents become involved through providing constant encouragement, through affording sufficient time and space to their children for study, through monitoring their homework, and through serving as a role model by means of engaging in recreational reading and actively providing educational support to their children.

The current study also discovered that at-home parental involvement, which involves providing support to children on their homework, is the most commonly practised form of involvement by parents. A parent described the situation at home as follows:

“I was good at school with Maths, so I will assist my child when [I] am free, and my son has really improved in his performance and confidence in Maths.” (Parent 7)

The findings involved agree with Rodriguez et al.’s (2017) assertion that parents who communicate their interests in the subject of Mathematics help to instil a sense of confidence in their children, as well as helping to boost their academic performance. Similarly, Yan and Lin (2005) demonstrate that learners whose parents are actively engaged in their children’s education are more inclined to excel in Mathematics than do their fellow learners.

Building a true teacher–parent partnership necessitates the collaboration of parents and educators, so as to be able to develop shared meaning about education. By means of opening up communication channels between school and home, parents can learn to understand the educational objectives of the school and to strive to achieve those objectives relating to their children, thereby helping to build up a true partnership. Majola (2008) concurs with the above when mentioning that communication is a vital tool for achieving the effective functioning of any institution. In this regard, the present study discovered that the schools communicated with the parents through letters, which were viewed as being the cheapest mode of communication. However, the most pressing challenge to emerge from such findings was the failure by the schools involved to ensure that the parents received the letters. One participant said:

“Learners take letters to their parents, but we are not sure whether they receive these letters.” (T4:S1)

The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 stipulates the inclusion of parents in the SGB. Such participation involves planning, organising, leading, supervising, policymaking, decision-making, controlling and coordination, which are the primary management duties of the SGBs (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010). The findings made in the current study reveal that parents tend to have only a limited understanding of all their duties, with them being reluctant to volunteer for service on the SGB. Parents who members of the SGB stated the following:

“The principal of this school is doing things his own way; we are not involved in anything.” (Parent 2)

“We are not consulted in anything in this school, as member[s] of [the] SGB, we are called [only] for signatures.” (Parent 6)

Dodd and Konzal (2000) confirm that teachers can sometimes display the wrong attitude towards parents, tending to view them as intruders, rather than as partners in the governance of their school. As a result, parents can sometimes choose to distance themselves from becoming involved in school governance.

### **Barriers that limit the extent of parental involvement in schools**

The principals, who described the extent of the involvement of parents in their schools as being unsatisfactory, mentioned that poor parental involvement was a key challenge faced by schools.

They indicated that the lack of parental involvement was one of the biggest challenges in their schools. For example, one principal indicated that parents were not prepared to become involved in their children's education, in the following words:

"I think attitude is a problem here. Parents are lacking the zeal to be involved in their children education. They only leave the whole burden of teaching their children to the school, and they distance themselves [from it]." (P2)

Similarly, a teacher stated that parents tend to be uninterested in becoming involved in their children's schools, adopting a negative attitude towards such involvement. Raising the issue of poverty as a contributory factor towards the non-involvement of parents, one teacher noted the following:

"[The m]ajority of our parents here are uneducated, which really result[s] in [a] lack [of] ... interest to involve themselves [in the schooling of their children]. Some decide to distance themselves due to [adopting a] wrong attitude. Poverty causes some to think that they are less needed by [the] schools [than they would like to be]." (T3:S1)

Such findings concur with those of Oranga et al. (2022), that parents with a poor educational background, or who are illiterate, generally suffer from more hindrances than do those who are better educated, in terms of their involvement in their children's schooling. In addition, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) support the view that parents sometimes undermine their own potential, feeling that they are not suitable to serve as partners with educators in education, resulting in them distancing themselves from them.

One teacher shared her dissatisfaction with the lack of parent support, saying:

"Parents of this school are uncooperative; they only care about the drinking [*umqombothi*] traditional beer, and, when you try to work with them, they are not available. Again, sometimes when you try to correct the child's wrong behaviour, they normally side with their kids." (T2:S1)

The above-mentioned finding links well with Rogers et al. (2009), who confirm that parents are needed in schools to assist their children's teachers with the shaping of learner behaviour, with the providing of discipline, and with the discouraging of misbehaviour in classrooms. In addition, Ndwandwe, (2014) reveals that some parents hold the belief that teachers know everything and can handle everything themselves, so that they conclude that their involvement is redundant to the schooling of their children.

The current study's findings highlight the issue of illiteracy as being the cause of many parents' lack of involvement in their children's homework. The participants interviewed indicated that illiteracy is a challenge to many parents, as some cannot understand the subjects that their children are studying. For example, one teacher said:

"Some parents still struggle to fill even a simple form; they ... always seek our help. I think the problem is the majority are not educated." (T3:S2)

The present study also discovered that some parents struggle to comprehend various subjects their children are studying, as in the following example:

"I used to assist my child while [they were] still in ... primary [school], but now the material is [too] difficult for me [to understand]." (Parent 4)

Hornby and Lafaele (2011:43) affirm that parents without a high school education commonly tend to undermine their own potential of working with their children's teachers, feeling too inferior to work with them, and believing that the latter are better qualified to deal with the situation than they are.

Time was voiced as being a hindrance to effective parent involvement, with one participant remarking that school meeting times coincided with their hours at work. The parents in such communities tended to work at some distance from their homes, with there being little time available for them to attend school meetings. In connection with the above, a parent noted:

"I don't have [enough] time. Usually my child reads in his room late, and I will be tired. Every time I asked [about] them ... not having homework, they would simply tell me that they have [i.e. had] done them [i.e. it] at school. I [am] also working, [and] the school meeting sometimes clash[es] with working time." (Parent 6)

A teacher expressed a similar view:

"Parents are not involved due to time constraints, and I think [that] the problem [is that] they have a lot on their hands." (T3:S4)

The above finding is in line with the findings made by Onwughalu (2011), who confirms that time acts a barrier to parental involvement, due to the conflicting work schedules involved. as a result, parents often tend to be overcommitted to their work, such as working both double and night shifts. Likewise, LaRocque et al. (2011) reveal that parents might be too busy to become involved in their children's education.

The present study found that teacher training was the most frequently voiced barrier to parental involvement in their children's schools. None of the teachers who formed part of the current research was trained to work with parents, and none had previously attended any parental involvement workshop. In relation to the above, some of the teachers involved commented as follows:

"The school never provided us with training. We want parents to provide support to [i.e., for] their children's learning at home." (T2:S2)

"I have never been invited to any parent involvement training. Maybe if they can organise workshops, maybe we can do things better." (T4:S2)

The above-mentioned findings are consistent with those of Borup (2016), who argues that inadequate preparation is another noticeable barrier to parental involvement in schools. The desire of teachers to promote parental involvement might be hindered by the parents' lack of skills and knowledge regarding how to involve the parents in the schooling of their children. Epstein (2018) notes that few novice teachers know either how to establish and implement partnership programmes effectively, or how to sustain the involvement of parents in their children's education throughout their schooling.

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## CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of learners in selected secondary schools. Parental involvement was seen to be more than ever required in South Africa, since such involvement provides multiple benefits for the functioning of a school and for improving learners' academic performance. The extensive research that has been undertaken in the past indicates that parental involvement tends to have a positive impact on children's academic achievements. However, despite acknowledging the significance of parental involvement as being the most powerful tool available, in terms of influencing children's education, both academically and behaviourally, the current study revealed that the extent of parental involvement in the selected schools remained unsatisfactory. The parents concerned failed to take an active role in their children's education, with them distancing themselves from school matters. As informed by the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, the above research argues that parents, through the various types of parental involvement, can build up their confidence as active participants in their children's education. They can do so by means of becoming involved in school-related decision-making processes, by being willing to take on leadership roles related to the school that their children attend, and by means of establishing effective communication channels with educators at the school to discuss matters related to their children's education. In addition, parents can render support to schools and educational programmes in the community, thereby becoming active school community members. Only limited research has, as yet, been undertaken into examining the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of learners in the Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga, South Africa. The present paper has served to close the existing gap, with it having made a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge, by means of examining the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. Another contribution made by the paper lies in its exploration of various barriers that are still hindering the effective implementation of parental involvement in schools. The findings made have revealed that the lack of parental desire and confidence, conflicts in home-school scheduling, negative teacher attitudes, the lack of appropriate teacher training and illiteracy all hinder effective parental involvement.

## Recommendations

Based on the present findings, the following recommendations are aimed at promoting effective parental involvement:

- Teachers and parents should establish good home-school relations, with parents and schools collaborating closely, so as to improve their interpersonal relations for the benefit of learners in Ehlanzeni-based secondary schools.
- The government should use retired or unemployed teachers to educate and empower illiterate parents. The school management team and the SGB should both provide special adult literacy classes for the parents involved.

# Impacts of Parental Involvement on English Language Learning of Vietnamese Secondary School Students: Understanding Parents' Perceptions

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## Abstract

*This paper reports a descriptive study that examined Vietnamese parents' perceptions of the impacts of their parental involvement on their children's English language learning at secondary school. It draws on data collected as part of a larger project. Data were collected using including a questionnaire and semi-interviews and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings reveal that parents held positive perceptions of their involvement on their children's English language learning outcome. Implications for practical applications of parental involvement are also presented.*

**Key Words:** *parental involvement, middle schools, secondary level, parents' perceptions, English language learning.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Research into parental involvement has addressed its role and positive impact on children's academic performance, especially for English language learning the past few decades. However, there are still many aspects of parental involvement that have not yet been fully explored. Parental involvement has been looked at from the teachers' and administrators' perceptions but has not really been studied through the eyes of parents. For example, Baker, Kessler-Skar, Piotrkowski, and Parker (1999) looked at the type of parental involvement that teacher reported they knew about and the involvement they did not have knowledge of. However, these researches rarely asked the parents about their involvement. Also, Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) cared for parental involvement throughout the time but just judged this involvement with the teachers' perception. Then in 2002, Levine looked at teachers' perceptions of parent involvement and how the parents influence the development of children's literacy skills but she failed to ask the parents about their own involvement. A few studies have been conduct that involves the parents being asked question, but they are few and small. This paper is going to address that problem and investigate to understand parents' perceptions of parental involvement in English language learning, particularly in their secondary school children in the Mekong delta, Vietnam.

The research question that guided the study reported on in this paper was: "What are parents' perceptions of the impacts of parental involvement on children's English language learning at secondary school?"

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Definition of Parental Involvement

The definition of parental involvement has been discussed for many years, therefore there are several definitions of parental involvement. Morgan, Fraser, Dunn and Cairns (1992) explained parental involvement as a complex intercommunication between parents and teachers which facilitates their perception and background knowledge to get involved in children's education tasks. Redding (1992) said that parental involvement is related to parental engagement in learning in home environment or any learning exercise. According to Grolnick and





Slowiaczek (1994), parental involvement, in general, is a devotion in which all the knowledge that parents have are given to their kids. Sheldon and Epstein (2005) defined parental involvement as a large number of various activities and collaborations among schools, families and communities. A good education is shaped by the coordinated interactions between these factors, in particular, the bond between school and parents (Vural, 2004). So, there is no doubt that a child's success in school relies a great deal on the combined efforts of home and school. Both of them should collaborate with each other for the sake of the academic performance of the child.

### ***B. Types of Parent Involvement***

The differences of types of parent involvement may require parents to be involved in school activities at various degrees and levels. The amount of time that parent involvement requires depends on the sort of parent involvement activities and whether the activity is in school or at home. These types include volunteerism and fundraising. Volunteerism includes active involvement within the classroom and also the elemental operations of the schools. Fundraising is another type of involvement that plenty of oldsters enjoy. Schools promote parents to be involved in fundraising to assist the school in obtaining resources for the advantage children.

Also, home involvement includes assisting children with homework, reading, inquiring some child's school day, and reviewing information sent home by the college. The last common kind of involvement is using outside resources apart from what's offered at the school (Vera et al., 2012). Other styles of parent involvement work better with some parents relying on language barriers, finances, transportation, daycare, and work obligations (Altschul, 2011). Eventually, last factors include race, education, training, school relation, and resources (Malone, 2015; Vera et al., 2012). Parents often provide moral and emotional support to their children, which translates into choosing appropriate schools for his or her children, offering a section to review, and being a model of hard work for them Medina, M., Guzmán, N., & Wong-Ratcliff, M. (2015).

### ***C. Parental Involvement and Secondary School Achievement***

Secondary schools have different atmosphere than elementary schools because students have less opportunities for self study than secondary school ones. Therefore, it is easily recognized that parents is a crucial factor of support of adolescents (Branwhite, 2000). Besides, it was said that students recognize their parents as the main source of knowledge available to them (Kandel & Lesser 1969).

Deplanty et al. (2007) said that teenagers are influenced in positive manner when home and school environment form a strong friendship. What is more, the way of various forms of parental involvement was examined during adolescent improvement periods in some studies (Eccles & Harold, 1996). Besides, Garcia Coll, Lamberty, Jenkins, McAdoo, Crnic, Wasik and Garcia (1996) emphasized that social position may affect parental involvement experiences (race, socioeconomic status (SES), and adolescents' gender).

Meanwhile, parents provide more space and time for their kids to develop their own autonomy instead of get involved in every process that their adolescents take which cause interruption of their children's autonomy process (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Wang et al., 2014). Also, some kinds of parental involvement decrease during adolescence period because parents may think that it may affect their kids' self-learning so they turn to scaffold independence and bolsters youth's decision making skill (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015).

### ***D. Parental Involvement in English Language Learning***

Although there are not many studies done about parental involvement in foreign language learning, a number of important concerns stand out about the parental involvement in English language learning.

Chi and Rao's (2003) said that teaching English belongs to totally teachers' responsibility. There is no need for parents to take the responsibility in their children's learning activities. This participation role may be a result of traditional views.

On the other hand, Xuesong (2006) revealed that high-class students from urban China were exposed to English language via different methods by their parents, such as motivating towards learning English, introducing English TV programs and monetary support for English learning. Some parents even help students in learning

English at home although they don't have much knowledge about it. In Hong Kong, for example, parents frequently encourage their kids to learn English by registering extra English classes or hiring tutors (Bray & Kwok, 2003).

Senechal (2006) conducted an important study about parents' direct teaching to support their children's education and indirect help to boost language and literacy in their longitudinal studies.

According to Lee (2008), in relation to second language learners, these parental factors towards a specific language have an impact on not only their children's attitudes, advantages and behaviors when learning that language but also their learning results.

In the study conducted in 2008, Arias and Morillo-Campbell categorized parental involvement in English language learning into two models based on diversification in parents in ELL and their communities. They said that in non-traditional models of parental involvement in ELL, it offers a mutual understanding between schools and families.

Lastly, Lamb (1976) found that fathers who took care seriously and showed love in their relationships with both daughters and sons promoted their children's development. Kalaycı, G., & Öz, H. (2018) also found that male and female parents showed no difference in their involvement.

### III. THE STUDY

In order to investigate parents' perceptions of the impacts of their parental involvement on their children's English language learning at secondary school, amixed-methods design was used in this study. The mixed-methods design which involves quantitative and qualitative approaches can provide an opportunity to gain in-depth understanding of a particular topic under investigation (Creswell, 2014). For the collection of quantitative data, a questionnaire adapted from Mahmoud (2018) was used. It had three sections with a total of 52 five-Likert items. The first section asks for parents' demographic information regarding gender and age. The second section asks for the frequency of parents' direct and indirect involvement in their children's English language learning. The third section seeks parents' perceptions of the impacts of their parental involvement on their children's English language learning results at secondary school. To complement the quantitative data, we conducted semi-structured interviews with six participating parents individually. The interview questions were divided into two clusters: frequency of parental involvement and parents' perceptions of the impacts of parental involvement.

Participants in this study were 146 parents whose children were attending the grades 6-9 at a secondary state school in Ben Tre province in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. They were selected on the basis of convenience sampling (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Of this sample, 70 participants (47.9%) were males and 76 participants (52.1%) were females. About age groups, 1 participant (0.7%) was 22-30, 35 participants (24%) were 31-40, 84 participants (57.5%) were 41-50, and 26 participants (17.8%) were 51 and over.

All of the questionnaire items were checked carefully and piloted to ensure the reliability the instrument. Thirty similar parents were randomly chosen to answer the pilot questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha for the pilot was .95, indicating a high reliability of the questionnaire. Therefore, the questionnaire was used for the actual data collection.

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were statistically analyzed using the computer software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The interview responses were hand coded, transcribed, and then translated into English. All of the interview transcripts were read and checked carefully and then categorized into themes to answer the above-mentioned research question.

#### IV. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study with regard to parents' perceptions of the impacts of parental involvement on their children's English language learning at a secondary school in Mekong Delta. The findings reveal that there is a moderate rate in the frequency of parental involvement and a variety of activities and parents held positive thoughts towards the impacts of their involvement on their children's English language learning at secondary school.

##### A. Frequency of Parental Involvement in Their Children's English Learning at Secondary School

###### 1) Insights into Frequency of Parental Involvement in Their Children's English Language Learning at Secondary School:

Part A of the questionnaire consists of 26 items which presents the frequency of parental involvement in their children's English language learning at Secondary School.

TABLE I

| THE MEAN SCORE OF THE FREQUENCY OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT |     |         |         |        |                |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
|                                                         | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
| MeanF                                                   | 146 | 1.50    | 5.00    | 2.8317 | .68280         |
| Valid N (listwise)                                      | 146 |         |         |        |                |

As can be seen from Table I, the total mean score of the overall frequency of parental involvement ( $M=2.83$ ,  $SD=.68$ ) was moderately acceptable.

TABLE II

PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS OF MEAN SCORE OF DIRECT INVOLVEMENT AND INDIRECT INVOLVEMENT

|        |              | Mean   | N   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|--------------|--------|-----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | MeanDirect   | 2.7619 | 146 | .69424         | .05746          |
|        | MeanIndirect | 2.9015 | 146 | .83339         | .06897          |

TABLE III

PAIRED SAMPLES TEST OF MEAN SCORE OF DIRECT INVOLVEMENT AND INDIRECT INVOLVEMENT

|   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | T      | Df  | Sig. (2-Tailed) |
|---|--------|----------------|-----------------|--------|-----|-----------------|
| - | .13962 | .69867         | .05782          | -2.415 | 145 | .017            |

Table II and III show that a paired samples T-test was run to assess which type of involvement parents get involved more in their children's English Language Learning of Secondary School: Direct or Indirect involvement. The result indicated that the difference between the two mean scores ( $M=2.76$ ,  $M=2.90$ ) is statistically significant ( $t=-2.4$ ,  $p=.017$ ). So, parents get involved in indirect involvement more than direct involvement.

TABLE IV  
GROUP STATISTICS OF FREQUENCY OF INVOLVEMENT OF MALE AND FEMALE PARENTS

|           | Gender | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-----------|--------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Mean      | Male   | 70 | 2.7824 | .65011         | .07770          |
| Frequency | Female | 76 | 2.8770 | .71286         | .08177          |

TABLE V  
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES TEST FREQUENCY OF INVOLVEMENT OF MALE AND FEMALE PARENTS

|                             | F     | Sig. | T     | Df      | Sig.(2-Tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
|-----------------------------|-------|------|-------|---------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Equal Variances Assumed     | 1.105 | .295 | -.836 | 144     | .405           | -.09461         | .11323                |
| Equal Variances Not Assumed |       |      | -.839 | 143.987 | .403           | -.09461         | .11280                |

As seen in the table IV and V, an independent samples T-test was run to find out if there is a difference in Parental involvement in their children's English Language Learning at Secondary School with regard to male parents and female parents. The mean of male parents' involvement was 2.78 (sd = .65), and the mean of female parents' involvement was 2.87 (sd = .71). The difference between the involvement of the two groups is not significant (Sig. = .295 >  $\alpha$  = 0.05 and Sig. (2-tailed) = .405 >  $\alpha$  = 0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between male parents and female parents in their involvement in their children's English Language Learning at Secondary School.

TABLE VI  
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST OF MEAN OF FREQUENCY OF AGE GROUPS

| Age Groups | N   | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | Minimum | Maximum |
|------------|-----|-------|----------------|------------|---------|---------|
| 22-30      | 1   | 2.653 | .              | .          | 2.65    | 2.65    |
| 31-40      | 35  | 2.775 | .6941          | .1173      | 1.50    | 5.00    |
| 41-50      | 84  | 2.819 | .6814          | .0743      | 1.65    | 4.58    |
| Over 50    | 26  | 2.819 | .6814          | .0743      | 1.88    | 4.77    |
| Total      | 146 | 2.831 | .6828          | .0565      | 1.50    | 5.00    |

TABLE VII

## TEST OF HOMOGENEITY OF VARIANCES

| Levene Statistic  | Df1 | Df2 | Sig. |
|-------------------|-----|-----|------|
| .093 <sup>a</sup> | 2   | 142 | .911 |

TABLE VIII

## ANOVA OF FREQUENCY OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF AGE GROUPS

|                | Sum Of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F    | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| Between Groups | .544           | 3   | .181        | .384 | .765 |
| Within Groups  | 67.057         | 142 | .472        |      |      |
| Total          | 67.601         | 145 |             |      |      |

Table VI, VII and VIII show the results of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to see if parental involvement in children's English language learning had some impacts with regard to age factor ranging from 22-30, 31-40, 41-50 to over 50. The mean of parents aged 22-30 was 2.65, the mean of parents aged 31-40 was 2.77, the mean of parents aged 41-50 was 2.81 and the mean of parents aged over 50 was 2.95. The difference between the involvement of four age groups is not significant (Sig. = .911 >  $\alpha$  = 0.05 and Sig. F (ANOVA) = .765 >  $\alpha$  = 0.05). In other words, there is no statistically significant difference in parental involvement in children's English language learning at secondary school with regard to age factor ranging from 22-30, 31-40, 41-50 to over 50. This indicates that parents of all ages tend to be equally involved in their children's learning of the English language.

## 2) *Insights into Frequency of Direct Involvement of Parents in their Children's English Language Learning at Secondary School:*

Analysis of the interview data reveals that the six participating parents got involved directly in their children's English learning by doing a number of activities.

### *Encouraging children to do their homework*

Among the six parents, two said that they assisted their children while they were doing their homework. To be specific, the first parent said he sometimes explained the difficult tasks to his child. Moreover, the second parent even said her son did his homework with her.

*If my son doesn't understand the lesson, I will explain it again to him based on what I know. But just sometimes, I don't have much time. (P1, line 6)*

*I also do homework with my son, the one at school or from online course. (P6, line 129)*

*About doing homework, I always encourage and get involved in doing homework with him. For example, I ask him to teach me a new word to make him engaged in. (P6, line 131)*

While other 2 parents argued that they always try to make their children do the homework on their own.

*I always encourage my child to do homework himself at home. (P3, line 59)*

*Sometimes, I have to follow him while doing my own work. (P3, line 61)*

*I ask my son to do extra English exercises to practice more what he learnt at school. (P4, line 82)*

*About doing extra exercise, I encourage him to spend an hour doing it everyday. (P4, line 87)*

Finally, the last two parents attributed the children's success to their teacher and stated that their role cannot go beyond reminding their children to do homework.

*Besides if she doesn't understand the lesson, I always ask her to contact her English teacher for help.*

*She usually asks her teacher when she has any problems. (P5, line 113)*

#### ***Encouraging children to watch English programs on TV or Youtube***

All participating parents see its advantages in improving listening skill and enhance vocabulary range and knowledge. However, four parents encourage their children to do so more frequently than the rest.

*It's helpful so I usually ask him to do so. (P1, line 10)*

*Whenever she finishes her homework, I always encourage her to do so. It's a good way to learn and to relax. (P2, line 43)*

*After he finishes his homework, I let him watch English programs for 30 minutes everynight. (P4, line 89)*

*I let her watch TV 3 times per week, and about an hour per day (P5, line 111)*

While only two parents were afraid that their sons would be addicted to it, so they only permitted them to do so on weekends.

*Yes, but not much. So, I only let him watch at weekend under my observation. (P3, line 67)*

*About watching TV, I'm afraid he will be addicted to it. So I only let him do so twice a week. (P6, line 133)*

#### ***Registering extra English classes for their children***

Five out of 6 participants showed a similar thought and frequency. Although extra class only accounts for only 3 sessions per week, it still shows a positive trend that they did care about building up and expanding knowledge for their children.

*Yes, studying at school is good to build up basic knowledge. Moreover, taking extra English class helps him recall in-class knowledge and have more time to practice more. (P1, line 12)*

*Three times a week with his friends (P1, line 18)*

*I let her study extra class afterschool 3 times a week. (P2, line 35)*

*I register extra English class three times 1 week. I think learning at school is not enough for him. Learning extra class provides him with more exercises and the teacher shows method of doing test which is good for him. (P3, line 63)*

*The rest of time she has to take extra English class. (P5, line 111)*

*It takes 3 time per week on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. (P5, line 115)*

*About online course, I choose 3 times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday (P6, line 132)*

There is only one parent showed his dedicated involvement by hiring a tutor to improve his child's speaking skill and it also comprised of 3 sessions.

*...twice a week with the tutor. (P1, line 19)*

#### ***Praising children during their learning process***

Two parents always did so. The second parent indicated that she tried to enhance children's motivation by always praising and giving her daughter advice.

*Although I can't help her much in her learning, I focus on her mental health, so I always praise and give her advice in taking care of her health. If she gets a bad score, I will support and motivate her to try next time. (P2, line 41)*

*I always praise and give her advice in taking care of her health. If she gets a bad score, I will support and motivate her to try next time. (P2, line 41)*

The other parent showed her concern by encouraging and reminding her son to try harder every day.

*I also encourage and remind him every day to try harder. (P3, line 65)*

### **Creating a friendly environment at home**

Several parents mentioned implementing this activity for their children because they want their children feel comfortable to learn English at home after school.

*Besides, I always create a comfortable learning environment at home which she can learn English better. (P2, line 41)*

*I always encourage my child to do homework himself at home by talking and praising to make him motivated in his English learning. (P3, line 59)*

*In addition to this, I always want him to learn comfortably, so creating a friendly environment at home is essential. (P6, line 131)*

### **Encouraging children to read English books**

Only one parent said that she encouraged her son to read English books more afterschool.

*I encourage him to read English books because it helps him to enhance his vocabulary. (P4, line 84)*

*About reading books, I ask him to read them 3-4 times per week. (P1, line 88)*

### **3) Insights into Frequency of Indirect Involvement of Parents in their Children's English Language Learning at Secondary School:**

Analysis from the interview data reveals that the three participating parents got involved indirectly in their children's English learning by doing a lot of activities.

#### **Supporting indirectly children in learning English**

Only one parent indicated that his child could learn the language without his involvement. Specifically, he mentioned his son learnt with a group of friends to share opinions or ask for advice with difficult exercises on regular basis.

*He has 2 close friends who take extra English class with. They usually make video call to share or asking for advice with difficult exercises. I see it really motivates him to learn more (P1, line 8)*

*He does it more regularly, about 4-5 times a week. Because I want him to be good at English, so he spend more time on learning it. (P1, line 16)*

#### **Keeping in touch with the English teacher**

All of the participants said they contacted the English to know about their children learning process at school.

*I always contact the teacher who directly teaches my son at school to know if he could learn well at school. (P1, line 24)*

*I ask my daughter's English teacher how she learns (P2, line 45)*

*I sometimes ask the teacher about my son's learning process. (P3, line 69)*



*I always spend time contacting English teacher sometimes to know the learning outcomes so that I can support him. (P4, line 93)*

*I really concern about my daughter learning process, so twice a week, I keep in touch with her English teacher. (P5, line 107)*

*I usually keep in touch with my son's English teacher at school and center to support more. (P6, line 137)*

#### **Keeping in touch with other parents**

Four out of 6 parents said they wanted to know what they learn at school, extra class and support them more at home and even share their own way to help their own children. However, they did it not very often due to their busy schedule at work.

*Moreover, I keep in touch with parents of my son's close friends to know what they learn at school, extra class and support them more at home (P1, line 25)*

*I have some friends whom children are studying with my child. We keep in touch to share our own ways to help our children, but not regularly because we are so busy. We let them learn by themselves more often. (P3, line 70)*

*Not regularly because we are so busy. (P3, line 70)*

*I also contact other parents at school to find good methods to help my son (P4, line 94)*

*We share and give advice to support our children 1-2 times a week. (P5, line 119)*

### **B. Parents' Perceptions of the Impacts of their Involvement on their Children's English Learning at Secondary School.**

#### **1) Insights into Parents' Perceptions of the Impacts of Parental Involvement on their Children's English Language Learning at Secondary School:**

The second part of the questionnaire consists of 26 items which presents the perceptions of the impacts of parental involvement in their children's English language learning at Secondary School.

TABLE IX

THE MEAN SCORE OF THE OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

|                       | N   | Mini<br>mum | Maxi<br>mum | Mean       | Std.<br>Deviation |
|-----------------------|-----|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|
| MeanImpact            | 146 | 1.23        | 4.92        | 2.602<br>7 | .72668            |
| Valid N<br>(listwise) | 146 |             |             |            |                   |

As can be seen from Table 4.9, the total mean score of the perceptions of the impacts of parental involvement ( $M=2.60$ ,  $SD=.72$ ) was moderately acceptable.

TABLE X

PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACTS

|        |                        | Mean   | N   | Std. Deviation | Std. Mean |
|--------|------------------------|--------|-----|----------------|-----------|
| Pair 1 | MeanPerceptionDirect   | 2.5854 | 146 | .72506         | .06001    |
|        | MeanPerceptionIndirect | 2.6201 | 146 | .81168         | .06718    |



TABLE XI

## PAIRED SAMPLES CORRELATIONS OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACTS

|        |                          | N   | Correlation | Sig. |
|--------|--------------------------|-----|-------------|------|
| Pair 1 | Mean Perception Direct   | 146 | .788        | .000 |
|        | Mean Perception Indirect |     |             |      |

TABLE XII

## PAIRED SAMPLES TEST OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACTS

| PAIRED SAMPLES TEST OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACTS |            |          |          |                       |                       |      |    |                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------|----|--------------------|
|                                                            |            |          | Mea<br>n | Std.<br>Devia<br>tion | Std.<br>Error<br>Mean | t    | df | Sig.(2-<br>tailed) |
| Mean                                                       | Perception | Direct   | -        | .5068                 | .04194                | -    | 14 | .408               |
| Mean                                                       | Perception | Indirect | .03477   | 1                     |                       | .829 | 5  |                    |

A paired sample T-test was run to assess which type of involvement parents perceive its impacts in their children's English Language Learning of Secondary School: Direct or Indirect involvement. The result indicated that the difference between the two mean scores ( $M=2.58$ ,  $M=2.62$ ) is not statistically significant ( $t=-.82$ ,  $p=.40$ ). So, parents' perception of the impacts of direct involvement is the same as indirect involvement. (Table X, XI and XII)

TABLE XIII

## GROUP STATISTICS OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH REGARD TO GENDER FACTOR

|             | Gender | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------------|--------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Mean Impact | Male   | 70 | 2.5165 | .72343         | .08647          |
|             | Female | 76 | 2.6822 | .72532         | .08320          |

TABLE XIV

## INDEPENDENT SAMPLES TEST PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH REGARD TO GENDER FACTOR

|                             | F    | Sig. | t | df      | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
|-----------------------------|------|------|---|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Equal variances assumed     | .131 | .718 | - | 144     | .169            | -.16570         | .12001                |
| Equal variances not assumed |      |      | - | 143.079 | .169            | -.16570         | .11999                |

As can be seen from Table XII and XIV, an independent samples T-test was run to find out if there is a difference in parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's English Language Learning at Secondary School with regard to gender factor. The mean of male parents' perceptions was 2.51 (sd = .72), and the mean of female parents' perceptions was 2.68 (sd = .72). The difference between the perceptions of the two groups is not significant (Sig. = .71 >  $\alpha$  = 0.05 and Sig. (2-tailed) = .169 >  $\alpha$  = 0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female in parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's English Language Learning at Secondary School.

**TABLE XV****THE MEAN SCORES OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACTS WITH REGARD TO AGE FACTOR**

| Age groups | N   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | Minimum | Maximum |
|------------|-----|--------|----------------|------------|---------|---------|
| 22-30      | 1   | 2.1923 | .              | .          | 2.19    | 2.19    |
| 31-40      | 35  | 2.6484 | .63502         | .10734     | 1.46    | 4.81    |
| 41-50      | 84  | 2.5449 | .76231         | .08318     | 1.23    | 4.65    |
| Over 50    | 26  | 2.7441 | .73709         | .14456     | 1.81    | 4.92    |
| Total      | 146 | 2.6027 | .72668         | .06014     | 1.23    | 4.92    |

**TABLE XVI****TEST OF HOMOGENEITY OF VARIANCES OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS THE IMPACTS**

| Levene Statistic   | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|--------------------|-----|-----|------|
| 1.307 <sup>a</sup> | 2   | 142 | .274 |

**Table XVII****ANOVA OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACTS**

|                | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F    | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| Between Groups | 1.042          | 3   | .347        | .653 | .582 |
| Within Groups  | 75.526         | 142 | .532        |      |      |
| Total          | 76.568         | 145 |             |      |      |

As seen in Table XV, XVI and XVII, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also conducted to see if parents' perceptions of the impacts of parental involvement in children's English language learning with regard to age factor ranging from 22-30, 31-40, 41-50 to over 50. The mean of parents aged 22-30 was 2.19, the mean of parents aged 31-40 was 2.64, the mean of parents aged 41-50 was 2.54 and the mean of parents aged over 50 was

2.74. The difference between the involvement of 4 age groups is not significant (Sig. = .274 >  $\alpha$  = 0.05 and Sig. F (ANOVA) = .582 >  $\alpha$  = 0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in parents' perceptions of the impacts of parental involvement in children's English language learning at Secondary school with regard to age factor ranging from 22-30, 31-40, 41-50 to over 50.

## **2) Insights into Parents' Perceptions of the Impacts of Direct Involvement on their Children's English Language Learning at Secondary School:**

### **Encouraging children to do their homework**

Two parents argued that their involvement did not create a significant difference on their children's English development. Among them, one parent thought it was somewhat effective and the other thought it was not so effective.

*I don't think it helps him because most of the time he just does it himself or discusses with his friends. (P1, line 14)*

*I see after asking teacher, she can do her homework well. (P2, line 37)*

*The scores have not improved much (P3, line 69)*

*And his grammar is better thanks to doing extra exercise. (P4, line 91)*

*I see she shows her interest and learns better than before (P5, line 117)*

One parent reflected her desire to do exercise with her daughter. She stated that they learnt new words together for contributing to her daughter's vocabulary.

*For example, by doing homework with me, he can learn vocabulary better. (P6, line 135)*

### **Encouraging children to watch English programs on TV or YouTube**

Parents believed that they had an influence on letting their children watch TV. Five participating parents thought watching English programs was very effective.

*It's helpful so I usually ask him to do so. (P1, line 10)*

*I think learning from English programs is also effective. (P2, line 45)*

*Watching English programs makes her interesting. (P3, line 47)*

*His learning outcome has been improved so much especially listening and speaking skills through reading books and watching TV (P4, line 91)*

*I see she shows her interest and learns better than before (P5, line 117)*

Only one parent thought it was somewhat effective. She also mentioned the importance of the language exposure for the development of English.

*I think my son can learn with many different accents, not only one at school. But, it is somewhat effective. (P6, line 135)*

Two of those parents said it was also a relaxation, but only one thought it was not effective.

*It's a good way to learn and to relax. (P2, line 43)*

*But I think it's just for fun. (P3, line 67)*

### **Registering extra English class for their children**

All of the parents show a positive thought of letting their children learn extra English class. They all thought it was very effective.

*His English teacher and tutor said he got better scores (P1, line 22)*

*As I see, it is effective because she learns with the teacher who teaches her in class (P2, line 35)*

*I ask my daughter's English teacher how she learns. Her response is she learns quite well. She also gets better score recently. (P2, line 45)*

*Learning extra class provides him with more exercises and the teacher shows method of doing test which is good for him. (P3, line 63)*

*I see she shows her interest and learns better than before (P5, line 117)*

*Besides, by learning online, his speaking reaction is quite good, so I think it is effective. (P6, line 135)*

#### ***Praising children during their learning process***

Caring about mental health is also a good method to motivate children to learn better. Two parents thought it was somewhat effective.

*It somewhat makes her motivated. (P2, line 41)*

*Although, he followed, maybe he doesn't study hard enough. So I think it's somewhat effective. (P3, line 65)*

In terms of creating a friendly environment at home

Three out of six parents who mentioned this activity thought it was effective to help motivate their children try hard and feel comfortable when learning English at home.

*Also, when she learns in a comfortable atmosphere at home, she feel interested. (P2, line 47)*

*So so. Although he learns extra class, follows my requirement and feels comfortable to learn at home, his score has not improved yet. (P3, line 65)*

*For example, by doing homework with me in a friendly environment, he can learn vocabulary better. (P6, line 135)*

#### ***Creating a friendly environment at home***

Several parents perceived by creating comfortable learn in environment at home, their children can learn English comfortably and are more motivated.

*... which she can learn English better. (P2, line 41)*

*... praising to make him motivated in his English learning. (P3, line 59)*

*... I always want him to learn comfortably, so creating a friendly environment at home is essential. (P6, line 131)*

#### ***Encouraging children reading English books***

Only one parent said by letting children read books in English, their vocabulary, listening and speaking skills are enhanced.

*It helps him to enhance his vocabulary. (P4, line 84)*

*His learning outcome has been improved so much especially listening and speaking skills through reading books. (P4, line 91)*

### **3) Insights into Parents' Perceptions of the Impacts of Indirect Involvement in their Children's English Language Learning at Secondary School:**

Analysis from the interview data reveals that the six participating parents showed their perceptions towards their indirect involvement in their children's English learning by doing a lot of activities.

***Encouraging indirectly children in learning English***

The only parent thought it was very effective in promoting his son's speaking skill.

*He shows interest in learning it by actively interacting more with his friends to speak English, (P1, line 21)*

***Keeping in touch with the English teacher***

One parents thought it was quite effective to ask about his child's learning process from the English teacher.

*It's quite effective. (P1, line 24)*

One parent said the partnership with teacher will support and improve the education process.

*I find it quite effective because two sides which are family and teacher can support more for the child. (P2, line 51)*

In contrast, four parents showed teacher's guidance and feedback are effective for them to help know the learning process and remind them to try.

*Yes, I know more about his learning process at school and remind him to practice more at home. (P3, line 72)*

*I always spend time contacting English teacher sometimes to know the learning outcomes so that I can support him. (P4, line 93)*

*I really concern about my daughter learning process, so twice a week, I keep in touch with her English teacher. I always observe my daughter's learning at home and listen to the teacher's feedback at school to get the precise information. (P5, line 107)*

*So I think listening from teacher's feedback is very effective. (P6, line 138)*

***Keeping in touch with other parents***

Two parents thought this involvement was somewhat effective because they just shared or followed their children's learning process when needed. The rest of time, their children discussed or learnt with teacher or by themselves as they said before.

*It's also somewhat effective because we just follow and remind them when needed. (P1, line 25)*

*We let them learn by themselves more often. (P3, line 70)*

One parent thought it was effective because she could update information and suitable method for her son.

*I also contact other parents at school to find good methods to help my son. Besides, I also join in Parent Association to update information and suitable methods. (P4, line 95)*

One parent said she didn't have time to keep in touch with other parents.

*And I don't have time to contact other parents because I am busy at work. (P6, line 138)*

**V. DISCUSSION**

The results of the current study indicates that in general Vietnamese parents held positive thoughts about the impacts of their parental involvement on their children's English language learning at secondary school. However, they felt that although they organized quite a number of activities to get involved in their children's learning of English, their involvement was just at a moderate level and that the impact was also just at a moderate level. Their children's English was still not very good. These findings are quite opposite with the ones in Dubois et al, 1994, who asserted that home-based parental involvement clearly has positive effects on students' success.

However, findings from the interview indicate that the parents have a positive attitude toward their participation in the learning activities of their children. This argument can be explained with Erdener and

Knoeppel's (2018) result revealing that parents are in the opinion that they accept parents' positive influence on children's achievement although education is school's job even though. These findings verify this argument.

When it comes to the relationship between parents' demographic characteristics and their perceptions about parental involvement, the results suggest no statistically significant difference in terms of gender factor. This finding is consistent with what Kalaycı, G., & Öz, H. (2018) found. In this study, male and female parents made no difference in their perceptions of the impacts.

Findings from the interview reveal that, we can see several parents provide emotional support rather than being directly involved with their children's studies. This fact aligns with the data provided by Medina, Guzmán & Wong-Ratliff (2015) who affirmed that parents of Latin American background tend to provide some form of moral and emotional support, be it by helping them with their assignments, finding an appropriate school for them or simply by being a good role model to them, and how this behavior from Latino parents is based on cultural practices and beliefs. Found that

The second finding from the interview is that some of them highlighted their inclination to understand their children's world, provide a welcoming and motivating home environment for them and spend time with the children, talking and listening to them in patience and love. This finding is in agreement with not only Mahmoud's (2018) result but also Şad and Gürbüzürk's (2013) finding, suggesting that parent often provide a reinforcing environment for their children at home so as to assist their learning.

Besides, parent-teacher relation is very important for a successful child. It can keep both of them aware of what is going on inside and outside schools. The results of the interview with regard to parents' relation with teachers support the above assumption. Nearly all parents' response is to construct partnership with the teachers since it reinforces the students' achievement and promotes the quality of education. The findings of the interview regarding parents-teachers partnership indicate that they frequently keep in touch with teachers, so there is a high level of information exchange about the child's learning outcome and suitable methods between them, which is in consistence with findings of the previous research (Mahmoud, 2018). However, this finding is opposite to what Chi and Rao's (2003) said. In their study, parents agreed that teaching English belongs to totally teachers' responsibility. There is no need for parents to take the responsibility in their children's learning activities.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The major findings from this present study provide insights into parents perceptions about the impacts of their involvement on their children's English language learning at secondary school. Those beliefs lay the groundwork for the involvement in actual practices. In light of those findings, some pedagogical implications are given.

First, it is for parents and teachers. As parents mentioned earlier in the findings, parents agreed keeping in touch with teacher has an impact on helping them know their children educational outcomes and support when needed. Thus, the most important implication is to maintain short meetings and discussions as usual. It is especially important for both of them to interact and understand each other to support children in learning English. These meetings or discussions can held online or in real life depending on their schedules and convenience.

Also, it is important to keep parents well aware of opportunities to be involved and of the happenings in the school and classroom. This research seems to say that although not all parents mentioned visiting schools, they may still be active and interested in their child's education. Also, the only relationship with schools is to contact the English teacher to update their children's academic process. Therefore, part of the job of educators is to make parents aware of what is occurring at the school and any/all opportunities to be involved such as attending training, seminars and workshops about how to work in a parallel line with teachers and to consolidate and further practice what the teacher had already started in the classroom. Parents should be reminded constantly through notes, phone calls, and daily conversations that they are needed and wanted in the classroom and school (if they are truly wanted) and what involvement opportunities there are in the school and classroom.

Lastly, findings from the present study show that although parents had a variety of involvement ranging from direct to indirect to encourage their children to learn English. However, these activities are still around their





## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Parental involvement, learning participation and online learning commitment of adolescent learners during the COVID-19 lockdown

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(Received: 5 September 2020; Revised: 7 November 2020; Accepted: 24 February 2021;  
Published: 8 April 2021)

During the escalating coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, attempting to contain its spread, a large number of educational institutions shut down face-to-face teaching and learning activities globally due to a complete lockdown. This lockdown revealed emerging vulnerabilities of education systems in the low- and middle-income countries of the world, with Nigeria being no exception. Given these concerns, this research study assessed parental involvement, learning participation and the commitment to online learning of adolescent learners during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. An online survey questionnaire was employed to examine the level of online learning commitment and the contributory roles of each of the factors to online learning commitment of adolescent learners. In total, 1407 adolescents (male = 38.8%; female 61.2%) aged between 12 and 20 years (mean = 15; SD = 4.24) responded to the online survey, which was open for 2 months. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency distribution and inferential statistics of multiple regression. The findings revealed that the commitment level of adolescent learners to online learning was high. The findings further yielded a coefficient of  $R = 0.439$  and  $R^2 = 0.192$  variance in the prediction of the outcome measure. Parental involvement contributed 32% ( $\beta = 0.322$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and learning participation contributed 23% ( $\beta = 0.234$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) towards online learning. The study concludes that parental involvement and learning participation played a significant and positive role in the commitment of adolescent learners towards online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. The authors suggest that parents be encouraged to synergise with the digitalised revolution, while the need for further in-depth research on the subject is emphasised in the suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** adolescent learners; COVID-19 lockdown; online learning commitments; learning participation; parental involvement

## Introduction

To contain the spread of the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and minimise its impact on all social and economic activities, including education, many schools across all levels of education in approximately 188 affected countries (UNESCO 2020) were temporarily closed to protect school-going children and adolescents

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from the risks of contracting the disease. By April 2020, an estimated 1.6 billion students were temporarily out of school owing to social restrictions (Azevedo *et al.* 2020). This had become necessary, as school environments are risky places where large numbers of students meet and share, resulting in the rapid spread of the virus (Sintema 2020). Most African countries adopted practices of social restriction as the only definite way of preventing the spread of COVID-19 (Ghosh *et al.* 2020). This resulted in a serious threat to education functionality. The economic and educational impacts of the pandemic could be grievous, mostly in low- and middle-income countries. The impact on the academic programme and the performance of adolescent learners who should be getting ready for national examinations, such as Junior and Senior General Certificate Examinations, could be devastating (Sintema 2020).

In order to salvage the 2020 academic year, schools across the globe shifted to remote, virtual or online learning during the pandemic period (Duraku and Hoxha 2020). There are some challenges in the implementation of online learning in many low- and middle-income African countries due to inadequate power supply and poor internet connectivity. Scholars have, nevertheless, acknowledged several advantages of remote learning. These include digital education offering the opportunity for rapid learning, as well as significant innovative and creative opportunities for teachers and students. This technology makes learning available from different locations, encourages collaborative learning and the achievement of tasks, and enhances learning competence (Yaniawati *et al.* 2020). It furthermore enhances motivation and the development of a personal learning style (Karkar, Fatlawi, and Al-Jobouri 2020), as well as offers access to an unlimited amount of learning resources, among others (Lurvnik 2020; Moreno-Guerrero *et al.* 2020; Yokozeki 2020). These advantages are mostly being explored by adolescents who are regarded as digital natives (Stickel 2017). The online presence of adolescents during the lockdown may even have increased to a level only found among divided generations before the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of being confined to their homes by the threat of the disease (Ghosh *et al.* 2020).

Therefore, online learning could be much easier, more interesting and interactive for adolescents, as long as technological tools and resources are available and accessible. Thus, Joshi and Rose (2018) noted that adolescents' use of information and communication technology extends beyond just social networking. It also offers a learning platform for immediate access to comprehensive information. Online learning is defined as learning activities conducted in either a blended or hybrid format over the Internet without face-to-face interaction (Gilbert 2015; U.S. Department of Education 2010). Online learning, which is also often referred to as e-learning, occurs in an internet-enabled environment or classroom. It can be grouped into fully web-based, blended or hybrid, as well as traditional approaches, using online materials as supplements. Fully web-based learning involves teaching and learning all subjects on an internet platform with no room for face-to face contact, while blended learning comprises both classroom sessions and online methods. Before the lockdown, blended learning was commonly practised in higher education institutions, while a traditional approach using online materials as supplements was mostly common in elementary and high schools (Gilbert 2015; Herodotou *et al.* 2020). It is, however, important to promote online education as an alternative to face-to-face classroom teaching in times, such as this pandemic era. Simultaneously, knowledge of the preparedness of learners from low- or middle-income societies in terms of parental support and learners' participation and commitment is a gap to be filled, as the authors know of no research in this regard.

## **Past studies**

### ***Online learning commitment***

Although online learning is rapidly gaining universal acceptance and is fast becoming an inevitable means of making education accessible to all globally, many developing countries in Africa are unfortunately still deficient in several ways. They experience problems with poor power supply and internet network connectivity, as well as a shortage of trained, technologically skilled teachers (Gunga and Ricketts 2007), thus limiting access to education on the continent. Despite these challenges, it is likely that traditional methods of learning may no longer be permissible, which could have a seriously negative impact on numerous adolescent learners in developing nations, such as Nigeria, where economic hardship is worsening on a daily basis (Odunayo, Otito, and Otito 2013). These issues, among others, may have resulted in low attendance or poor participation of students in online learning, as established by Adeoye, Adanikin and Adanikin (2020). In addressing these concerns, access to any e-learning platforms, such as Adobe Captivate, Bamboo Learning, Blackboard Learn, Docebo, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Google Hangout (meet), Skype, WiZIQ, Elucidat, Zoom and so on, requires some level of commitment on the part of all education stakeholders, in this case the learners.

Learning commitment is a necessary prerequisite for the academic success and educational attainment of any student. While there are insufficient literature on learning commitment, related constructs, such as academic commitment, school engagement and teachers' commitment, have gained much attention in the literature. For instance, Buchanan, as cited in Mart (2013), perceived commitment as an addictive function related to job, organisation or employee involvement. Viljoen (2015) conceptualised academic commitment as the proportion of time and effort devoted to educational activities. According to Human-Vogel (2013), commitment involves alternative quality, investment, meaningfulness, satisfaction and long-term persistence with studies by students. In the same vein, Hew (2016) viewed students' engagement as an abstract and multidimensional construct that involves cognitive, behavioural and emotional engagement. Similarly, online learning commitment encompasses learners' affective, behavioural and cognitive engagement with online education. Markowitz (2017) described behavioural commitment as students' involvement in all educational or school-based activities, while the cognitive aspect of learning commitment reflects students' mental efforts directed towards school tasks (self-regulated learning) in anticipation of the eventual benefits of learning. Affective commitment, furthermore, explains students' responses to the online or virtual community (peers and teachers) in terms of connectedness and/or sense of association with all online educational activities (Fredricks, Filsecker, and Lawson 2016; Reschly and Christenson 2012; Wang and Fredricks 2014).

Previous studies have established the significance of online learning commitment for students' learning outcome, satisfaction and course completion (Hew 2016; Robinson and Hullinger 2008). In particular, Dumford and Miller (2016) found that online learning encourages and provides opportunities for learners' cognitive development at the expense of collaborative learning. Another study by Dixon (2015) discovered that online learning promotes higher order thinking, as well as collaborative work. Buelow, Barry and Rich (2018) revealed that students' online learning activities, such as interactive assignments, especially those that are thought-provoking, enhance

their personal development. Hew, Qiao and Tang (2018) and Jena (2020) recently argued that virtual learning during the COVID-19 lockdown is beneficial and ensures the continuity of learning because it is flexible and easily accessible. A qualitative study conducted by Dube (2020) in South Africa on rural online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic observed that there was an urgent need for online learning in the context of the pandemic to contain the spread of the virus. However, many rural learners were excluded from learning owing to inadequate internet connectivity resources, low-tech software and hardware, and the learning management system. Given this evidence, the level of adolescent learners' commitment to online learning education in Nigeria, where 40.1% of its population live in abject poverty and 52.1% are rural dwellers (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2019) is of concern to the authors of the current study.

### ***Parental involvement***

Previous studies indicate that online education of secondary school learners requires resources that can only be made available by parents. Hence, the involvement of parents in sustaining online education is of great importance to the continuity of such education. Parental involvement is generally defined as all forms of support given to school-age children by parents, guidance teachers or caregivers in order to ensure the accomplishment of a particular academic programme (Waters, Menchaca, and Borup 2014). In the conceptualisation of parental involvement, Epstein (1987) identified various forms of parental involvement in learners' educational success, among other learners' psychological and academic needs (food, clothing, shelter, a place to study and school material supplies), school-to-home communications, school activities and attendance of extra-curricular events, and learning activities. In the current study, parental involvement is perceived as the provision of online learning resources made available and accessible to learners for online learning purposes, which include internet-enabled tablets, smart phones, laptops and internet data or airtime. Essentially, in view of socio-economic disparity among adolescent learners in low- and middle-income countries, such as Nigeria, it is certain that without adequate involvement of parents during these unprecedented times of the COVID 19 pandemic, online learning may be an illusion. Typically, online learning requires some electronic resources or gadgets to facilitate the process, such as a desktop computer or laptop, internet connectivity or a smart phone, and power supply (Dube 2020; Odunayo, Otito, and Otito 2013).

Many of the studies published previously have demonstrated the link between parental involvement and students' academic achievement, performance, positive attitude to learning and successful schooling both within and outside Nigeria (Boonk *et al.* 2018; Fajoju *et al.* 2016; Ntekane 2018; Tran *et al.* 2020; Ugwuegbulem 2018; Umeana 2017; Waters, Menchaca, and Borup 2014). Specifically, Ntekane (2018). These studies focused on parental involvement in education, indicating that parental involvement plays an encouraging role that is beneficial for learners' academic outcome. Ugwuegbulem (2018) explored the role of parents' involvement in their children education in public schools of Imo State, Nigeria. The study entailed a qualitative enquiry involving 30 sampled parents from different socio-economic backgrounds as participants. The result of the study revealed that the low self-esteem of parents from low socio-economic backgrounds limits their adequate involvement in their children'

education. Likewise, the study of Boonk *et al.* (2018) revealed a significant positive correlation between parental involvement in terms of support for learning and academic achievement. Lawrence and Nkoane (2020) argued that parental engagement significantly contributed to the educational attainment of school-going adolescents in South Africa. Similarly, the outcome of the study of Tran *et al.* (2020) proved that when parents provide their children with the required support, it stimulates the home environment and promotes cognitive development. However, the link between parental involvement and online learning commitment among adolescent learners in Nigeria has not been studied yet.

### ***Online learning participation***

Learner participation is vital to the enhancement of online learning. Fundamentally, participation was conceptualised, as long ago as 1998 by Wenger, as taking part in or sharing with others some activities or enterprises. That makes it a process of being part of a group and relating in a reflective way with others. In other words, participation is a combination of actions, such as belonging, doing, feeling, thinking and talking with someone. Specifically, Davies and Graff (2005) perceived participation as the degree of students' access to information and communication and their engagement in many other activities. These include obtaining teaching and learning materials, contributing to discussions and persisting in group activities. In the view of Hrastinski (2008), participation is conceptualised as joining and taking part in a dialogue for active and engaged learning regardless of the total number of individuals involved in a discussion forum. To put it differently, participation is not measured by the percentage of the whole population or age group that takes part in a given activity, whether education or something else, as perceived by Harris *et al.* (2004). Drawing from these concepts, online learning participation, in this current study, involves individual adolescent learners taking part in online learning activities through any platform designed for such activities (Ahn *et al.* 2013). Simply put, it is the process of learning by taking part in online education.

Research evidence on online learners' participation in online learning is scanty. The few available studies established the significant impact of learning participation on online learning commitment and course completion. For instance, the study of Ahnn *et al.* (2013) revealed that learners' participation in online learning activities depends on the forms of online learning environment. The study suggested peer-to-peer interaction to sustain a participatory online learning environment. A recent study undertaken in India by Jena (2020) demonstrated the importance of online learning participation and engagement by both teachers and learners to adopt safety measures and maintain social distancing during the lockdown as the only way to continue teaching and learning activities. Similarly, Dube (2020) lamented the difficulties faced by numerous rural teachers and learners in respect of online learning participation in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic, which frustrate and marginalise efforts to teach and learn. It is important to note that most of these studies were carried out among higher education students, with little or no focus on secondary school learners. This observation is substantiated by a study of Ali (2020), who found that most universities worldwide participated in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another concern of the current study is that besides resources and staff readiness for online teaching and learning, too little is known about what motivates students'



participation in online learning during the pandemic and beyond. If continuity in implementing and integrating online teaching and learning during exceptional times such as the COVID-19 pandemic is to be maintained, this gap will have to be bridged.

### **Theoretical framework**

The engagement theory of Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998) was used as a theoretical lens to understand the link between parental involvement and learners' online learning participation and the contribution of adolescent learners' commitment to successful online learning. The basic idea of the theory is that learning involves an active psychological state, which entails affective, behavioural and cognitive commitment to technological tasks (Fredricks *et al.* 2005; Wiseman *et al.* 2017). In addition, the theory hypothesises that learners will be intrinsically motivated to learn when the learning environment and activities are technological in nature. This is because the use of online learning tools, such as web conferences, emails, video conferences, WhatsApps and Schoology will significantly increase the learning commitment of all participants. The engagement theory represents a new paradigm for learning and teaching in the divided generation that involves collaborative efforts, project-based assignments and non-academic focus for learning commitment to be achieved. The engagement theory is also based on constructivism that believes in collaborative efforts. This encourages and increases learners' commitment to online learning. Several theories are closely related to online learning, including the constructivist theory, situated learning theory and theory of adult learners (Demuyakor 2020; Wiseman *et al.* 2017). However, given the focus of this study, the authors adopted the engagement theory because it sheds light on how to increase the commitment of adolescent learners towards online learning. This is effected through the involvement of parents in providing digital resources and learners' participation, strengthening the non-academic, collaborative and project-based components of the theory. However, the main objective of this research study was to investigate the role of parental involvement and learning participation in the commitment of adolescent learners to online learning in Nigeria during the COVID-19 lockdown.

### ***This included the following research questions***

- RQ1:** What was the level of adolescent learners' online learning commitment during the COVID-19 lockdown?
- RQ2:** Did parental involvement and learning participation contribute significantly to the online learning commitment of adolescent learners during the COVID-19 lockdown?

### **Method**

The authors employed the quantitative research design of a survey approach to achieve the aim of this study. The study participants included were secondary school adolescents from Ibadan, Oyo State in the south-western part of Nigeria. In line with the mandatory social restrictions and home confinement during the lockdown, participation was open to all secondary school adolescent learners who were involved in online digital learning activities. Data were collected over a 2-month period using an

online survey Google questionnaire (**Fill out form**) comprising two sections. Section A deals with demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, class and participants' access to digital devices and social media platforms. Section B includes measures of online learning commitment, learning participation and parental involvement. The participants included were 1407 adolescent learners (male = 38.8%; female 61.2%) aged between 12 and 20 years (mean = 15: SD = 4.24). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency distribution and inferential statistics of multiple regression. This study complied with all ethics of research. This was done by allowing voluntary participation of the participants and guaranteeing the confidentiality of all the information, provided Pledged that the information supply will only be used for research purposes only.

## Results

Table 1 illustrates the demographical characteristics of the study participants. The average age of the participants was 15 years. There were more female (61.2%) participants than males (38.8%) and most (1029%–73%) were in senior classes, with only 378 (26.9%) participants in junior classes. There were more participants who had access to digital devices (1099%–78.1%) than those who depended on their parents' devices for accessibility (308%–21.9%). WhatsApp was popularly used as a social media platform for learning activities by 959 (68.2%) of the study participants, followed by Schoology (343%–24.24%) and YouTube (84%–6.0%). Very few of the participants were accessing learning activities through Facebook (21%–1.5%).

**RQ1:** What was the level of adolescent learners' commitment towards online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown?

The results in Table 2 revealed the level of participants' commitment to online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown in response to RQ1. The results make it clear that the participants' commitment to online learning was high, with 12 items rated above the average mean estimate of 2.7 and only three items scoring a mean below the average mean. Specifically, item 10, 'Online learning makes me remember

Table 1. Participants' demographic characteristics.

| Factors                        |                            | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Age (years)                    | 12–14                      | 371       | 26.4       |
|                                | 15–17                      | 371       | 26.4       |
|                                | Over 17                    | 665       | 47.3       |
| Gender                         | Male                       | 546       | 38.8       |
|                                | Female                     | 861       | 61.2       |
| Class                          | Junior secondary           | 378       | 26.9       |
|                                | Senior secondary           | 1029      | 73.1       |
| Digital devices' accessibility | Yes                        | 1099      | 78.1       |
|                                | No but use parents' device | 308       | 21.9       |
| Social medial platforms        | WhatsApp                   | 959       | 68.2       |
|                                | Schoology                  | 343       | 24.24      |
|                                | YouTube                    | 84        | 6.0        |
|                                | Facebook                   | 21        | 1.5        |



Table 2. Simple percentage showing response of the participants to online learning commitment during the COVID-19 lockdown.

| S. no. | Items                                                                                                       | SD%        | D%         | A%          | SA%        | M    | St.d |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|------|------|
| 1.     | Online learning is boring                                                                                   | 959 (68.2) | 343 (24.4) | 84 (6.0)    | 21 (1.5%)  | 1.40 | 0.67 |
| 2.     | Most of the time, I look forward to studying online                                                         | 203 (14.4) | 567 (40.3) | 595 (42.3)  | 42 (3.0)   | 2.33 | 0.75 |
| 3.     | I try hard to do all activities given to me online                                                          | 70 (5.0)   | 154 (10.9) | 1029 (73.1) | 154 (10.9) | 2.90 | 0.63 |
| 4.     | I participate in every online learning activity                                                             | 98 (7.0)   | 231 (16.4) | 910 (64.7)  | 161 (11.4) | 2.81 | 0.72 |
| 5.     | I think participating in all online learning activities is cumbersome                                       | 70 (5.0)   | 301 (21.4) | 854 (60.7)  | 175 (12.4) | 2.81 | 0.71 |
| 6.     | I like contributing to other learning activities online                                                     | 91 (6.5)   | 406 (28.9) | 749 (53.2)  | 119 (8.5)  | 2.65 | 0.73 |
| 7.     | I take an active role in group activities online                                                            | 77 (5.5)   | 133 (9.5)  | 1043 (74.1) | 147 (10.4) | 2.90 | 0.64 |
| 8.     | When I study online I relate it easily with real-life experience                                            | 63 (4.5)   | 329 (23.4) | 868 (61.7)  | 140 (10.0) | 2.77 | 0.68 |
| 9.     | I make up my own examples to help me understand the important concepts I learn from online classes          | 77 (5.5)   | 140 (10.0) | 1043 (74.1) | 147 (10.4) | 2.89 | 0.64 |
| 10.    | Online learning makes me remember and relate better with other things I already know (Knowledge)            | 42 (3.0)   | 133 (9.5)  | 1015 (72.1) | 217 (15.4) | 3.00 | 0.60 |
| 11.    | Learning online makes it easy to construct and interpret meanings from materials (Comprehension)            | 105 (7.5)  | 182 (12.9) | 966 (68.7)  | 154 (10.9) | 2.83 | 0.71 |
| 12.    | I have the ability to organise, develop and implement material in new and concrete situations (Application) | 77 (5.5)   | 203 (14.4) | 952 (67.7)  | 168 (11.9) | 2.86 | 0.68 |
| 13.    | With online learning I can differentiate and attribute components of ideas being taught (Application).      | 42 (3.0)   | 210 (14.9) | 987 (70.1)  | 168 (11.9) | 2.91 | 0.61 |
| 14.    | Things I am learning online enable me to evaluate and create new ideas (Synthesis)                          | 84 (6.0)   | 238 (16.9) | 966 (68.7)  | 112 (8.0)  | 2.79 | 0.66 |
| 15.    | With online learning I can judge and even critique ideas and contents being taught (Evaluation).            | 70 (5.0)   | 189 (13.4) | 994 (70.6)  | 154 (10.9) | 2.87 | 0.65 |

Average weighted mean value = 2.71

SD, Strongly disagree; D, disagree; A, agree; SA, strongly agree; M, mean; St.d, standard deviation.

and relate better with other things I already know (Knowledge)', yielded the highest score (mean = 3.0), followed by item 13, 'With online learning I can differentiate and attribute components of ideas being taught (Application)' (mean = 2.91), item 3, 'I try hard to do all activities given to me online', and item 7, 'I take an active role in group activities online', which had equal values (mean = 2.90). Then item 9, 'I make up my own examples to help me understand the important concepts I learn from online classes' (mean = 2.89), followed by item 15, 'With online learning I can judge and even critique ideas and contents being taught (Evaluation)' (mean = 2.87); item 12, 'I have the ability to organise, develop and implement material in new and concrete situations (Application)' (mean = 2.86); item 11, 'Learning online makes it easy to construct and interpret meanings from materials (Comprehension)' (mean = 2.83); item 4, 'I participate in every online learning activity', and item 5, 'I think participating in all online learning activities is cumbersome' had equal values (mean = 2.81). Item 14, 'Things I am learning online enable me to evaluate and create new ideas (Synthesis)' (mean = 2.79), and item 8, 'When I study online I relate it easily with real-life experience' (mean = 2.77) scored differently. However, item 1, 'Online learning is boring' had the lowest mean value (mean = 1.40), followed by item 2, 'Most of the time, I look forward to studying online' (mean = 2.33) and item 6, 'I like contributing to other learning activities online' (mean = 2.65).

**RQ2:** Did parental involvement and learning participation contribute significantly to commitment of adolescent learners towards online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown?

Table 3 shows the regression analysis of the collective and relative contribution of parental involvement and learning participation to online learning commitment in response to RQ2. The result established that the two predictive measures collectively and significantly contributed to commitment of the participants to online learning in the current study. The result yielded a coefficient of multiple regressions  $R = 0.439$  and multiple  $R^2 = 0.192$ , indicating that both measures combined accounted for 19.1% (Adj.  $R^2 = 0.191$ ) variance in the prediction of online learning commitment of the study participants. The other factors accounting for 79.1% variance in the prediction of online learning commitment are outside the scope of this study. Furthermore, the Analysis of Co-variance (ANOVA) result shows that the predictive measures significantly contributed to the response measure,  $F(2, 1306) = 155.590$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . In order to ascertain the weight of the relative contribution of each of the predictive measures, the results revealed that parental involvement made the highest contribution to online learning commitment ( $\beta = 0.322$ ,  $t = 12.629$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; 0.00), followed by learning participation ( $\beta = 0.234$ ,  $t = 9.184$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; 0.00). This implies that parental involvement and learning participation were responsible for the commitment of adolescent learners towards online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown.

## Discussion

There is no doubt that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has made demands that necessitated a paradigm shift in the whole world, resulting in massive technological advancement in all sectors, not excluding approaches in the educational sector. Related goals and aspirations will be pursued even after the lockdown occasioned by the pandemic. Educational institutions across all levels may have to adopt online learning

Table 3. Summary of the multiple regression analysis of the predictors on online learning commitment of adolescent learners.

| Model                  | <i>R</i>                      | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | Std. error of the estimate |       |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|
|                        | 0.439 <sup>a</sup>            | 0.192                 | 0.191                          | 3.43848                    |       |
| Model                  | Sum of squares                | Df                    | Mean square                    | <i>F</i>                   |       |
| Regression             | 3679.116                      | 2                     | 1839.558                       | 155.590                    |       |
| Residual               | 15440.991                     | 1306                  | 11.823                         |                            |       |
| Total                  | 19120.107                     | 1308                  |                                |                            |       |
| Model                  | Non-standardised coefficients |                       | Standardised coefficients      | <i>T</i>                   | Sig.  |
|                        | B                             | Std. error            | $\beta$                        |                            |       |
| (Constant)             | 28.421                        | 0.730                 |                                | 38.926                     | 0.000 |
| Parental involvement   | 0.816                         | 0.065                 | 0.322                          | 12.629                     | 0.000 |
| Learning participation | 0.144                         | 0.016                 | 0.234                          | 9.184                      | 0.000 |

<sup>a</sup>Predictors: (Constant), learning participation and parental involvement.

methods, not necessarily as a substitute for a face-to-face approach but as a supplement. In order to ascertain the readiness of secondary school learners in low- and middle-income countries, such as Nigeria, to incorporate an online learning approach in their educational activities and the possibility of implementing this, this study examined the role of parental involvement and learner participation in the online learning commitment of adolescent learners during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. The findings from this study established that adolescent learners who responded to the online Google survey were highly committed to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This outcome is not surprising, given the digital native nature of the participants who derived pleasure from online interaction even before the pandemic that confined them to their homes (Ghosh *et al.* 2020; Stickel 2017).

Similarly, the high level of commitment of the study respondents to online learning can be justified by numerous benefits that an online learning environment offers, as well as what provides motivation for online learning commitment. For example, Dumford and Miller (2016) found that online learning encourages and provides opportunities for learners' cognitive development at the expense of collaborative learning. Dixon (2015) discovered that online learning promotes higher order thinking, as well as collaborative work. The outcome of the current study is supported by evidence from several studies published previously, including those of Buelow, Barry and Rich (2018), Hew, Qiao and Tang (2018) and Jena (2020), which emphasised the importance of online learners' commitment in enhancing academic success, socio-personal and cognitive development. Particularly, Joshi and Rose (2018) aver that online engagement provides opportunities for adolescents to address some developmental challenges and complete developmental tasks. The engagement theory adopted for this study also justified this outcome that learners will be intrinsically motivated to learn when the learning environment and activities are technological in nature (Kearsley and Shneiderman 1998). As noted earlier, there are few local studies on the commitment of

adolescent learners to online learning in Nigeria. However, similar studies, such as those of Adigun (2020), Kamba (2009) and Odunayo, Otito and Otito (2013), affirm the importance of e-learning and teaching in enhancing academic achievement, as well as in promoting e-learning education in Nigeria.

The second research question examines the collective and individual contribution of parental involvement and learning participation to the online learning commitment of adolescent learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. The findings revealed that the collective contribution of parental involvement and learning participation was significant for the prediction of online learning commitment, while parental involvement accounted for the highest positive and significant contribution to online learning prediction, followed by learning participation. This suggests that parental involvement and learning participation were potent factors in promoting online learning commitment of adolescent learners in Nigeria. This finding confirms the results from the previously published studies, which concluded that parental involvement is pivotal to learning and for the academic or educational success of their children (Fajoku *et al.* 2016; Lawrence and Nkoane 2020; Ntekane 2018; Tran *et al.* 2020; Ugwuegbulem 2018). On a similar note, Boonk *et al.* (2018) revealed a significant positive correlation between parental involvement in terms of support for learning and academic achievement. Furthermore, learning participation has made a positive contribution to online learning commitment. This also agrees with the findings of Jena (2020), which reveals the importance of online learning participation and engagement by both teachers and learners to adopt safety measures and maintain social distancing during the lockdown as the only way to continue teaching and learning activities.

## Conclusion

Considering the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to contain the spread, a large number of educational institutions shut down face-to-face teaching and learning activities globally in response to the complete lockdown. This lockdown revealed emerging vulnerabilities in education systems in the low- and middle-income countries of the world. This lockdown revealed emerging vulnerabilities in the educational sector in the low- and middle-income countries of the world, with Nigeria being no exception. This makes it clear that flexible and resilient education systems are essential in the face of an unpredictable future. Stemming from this, the current study adopted a quantitative survey approach to examine parental involvement, learning participation and the online learning commitment of adolescent learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. The study participants responded to an online Google survey questionnaire, which was open for 2 months. In total, 1407 adolescent learners, who accessed online learning during the pandemic lockdown via WhatsApp, Schoology, YouTube and Facebook, took part in this study. The findings revealed a high level of commitment of adolescent learners towards online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. Parental involvement and learning participation significantly contributed to the prediction of online learning commitment. This outcome has implications for adolescent learners, educational stakeholders and government. Essentially, this study has contributed to knowledge in the area of literature on online learning commitment locally. Therefore, it is recommended that secondary school system should adopt and keep abreast with online learning education as a supplement to the traditional method of teaching and learning to maintain continuity during exceptional times

# PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING THE PARENTS' PERCEPTION

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## Abstract

Parental involvement is a significant factor influencing students' educational development. The present study explores Turkish parents' perceptions of involvement in their children's learning English in terms of their demographic characteristics. The participants of the present research include the parents of the students studying at the 1st to 4th grades of a private primary school in Ankara. This research was designed as a sequential explanatory study in which a 29-item survey was used along with a semi-structured interview. Findings suggest that parents have a positive attitude towards parental involvement and they are generally aware of the academic and psychological aspects of education. Therefore, they have a good relation with the teachers and they get involved in their children's English language education directly and indirectly. Findings also indicated that such demographic characteristics as gender, age, occupation or level of education, generally, make no significant difference on parents' perceptions about parental involvement.

*Keywords:* parental involvement, parents' perception, English language education, primary school

## 1. Introduction

Children's developmental process is undoubtedly influenced by social environment such as family, school and community whose partnership in education has recently gained in importance. The parents or other caregivers are the first teachers of children and this role continues even when they start school. In addition, parents need to become collaborative partners with teachers in order to provide an environment that assists their children's performance at school (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Research suggests that parental involvement affects not only the learning outcomes but also students' social, emotional, psychological and interactional improvement (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, & Maamari, 2016). On the other hand, it should be taken into consideration that parental involvement involves several dimensions other than parents such as children, teachers, school administrators or policy-makers (Epstein & Sanders, 1998). Therefore, parental involvement can be defined as the actions that the parents perform in order to boost their children's school achievement, which requires joining partnerships such as parent-child, parent-teacher and parent-parent (Mcneal Jr, 2014). In Turkey, the parents support the idea that they could create significant difference for their children's education when they get involved in the process; therefore, they reflect the idea that they must engage in the process actively (Tekin, 2011). Similarly, the research conducted by Erdener and Knoepfel (2018) suggests that the parents accept that parental involvement is an important factor influencing children's educational success without giving up the idea



education is school's responsibility. The present study grew out of the first researcher's teaching English to young learners in a private college and her interest in the Turkish parents' perceptions about parental involvement in English language teaching. Therefore, this research aims at finding out the Turkish parents' ideas about involving in their children's English learning process in relation to their demographic characteristics.

## **2. Literature Review**

Parental involvement is one of the most significant predictors of students' achievement. Given the prominence of parental involvement in education, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) proposes a framework in which they take parental involvement as a process and explain variables influencing this process. That is to say, their framework explains not only why and how the parents become involved in their children's education but also the possible outcomes of their involvement. They argue that in order to understand the process of parental involvement and enhance its level, it is important to explain the following aspects of parental involvement: (1) why parents become involved in their children's education, (2) how parents choose specific types of involvement, and (3) why parental involvement has positive influence on students' education outcomes.

Epstein et al. (2002), on the other hand, focus on the strategies that parents can use in order to get involved in their children's learning process. They argue that school, family and community interactions influence students' learning process directly and proposed the theory of overlapping spheres of influence which supports the idea that school, family and community are the institutions making children socialized and educated. Therefore, they suggest that these institutions need to work cooperatively for achieving common goals for the children who should be at the center of the system. Based on this theory, they assert a framework consisting of six involvement types that may be chosen by the schools according to the needs or expectations. The components of home-school partnership in this framework includes parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with family. The schools and parents may choose one or some of these strategies according to their needs and expectations.

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes parental involvement's critical role in students' educational development (see Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016; Niehaus & Adelson, 2014; Panferov, 2010). Teachers and parents have different viewpoints about parental involvement. For the teachers, parental involvement refers to the home activities with which parents help their children's academic achievement such as homework while from the parents' perspective, it means attending the educational decisions as an involvement strategy (Göktürk & Dinçkal, 2018). On the other hand, Epstein et al. (2002) suggest that teachers and parents need to work together in order to go into an efficient partnership and provide an effective learning environment for the children.

Factors thought to be influencing parental involvement have been explored in several studies. (Calzada et al., 2015; Pena, 2000; Tekin, 2011). It was found out that socio-economic status, parents' educational background, teachers' and school administrators' attitudes, cultural influences were the main predictors of parental involvement. Previous studies reported that the parents with low socio-economic status were less engaged in their children's education (Calzada et al., 2015; Tekin, 2011). Recent research also revealed that parents engaged in the children's education if they were invited by the teachers (LaRocque et al., 2011). In addition, Şad and Gürbüzürk (2013) studied the ways that parents participated in their children's education. They explored that parents chose to communicate with the children, to create

effective home environment, to support their personal development and to help homework rather than volunteering at school. More specifically, Cunha et al. (2015) researched parents' beliefs about homework involvement and their results showed that parents had positive attitudes towards homework and they focused on improving students' sense of autonomy and responsibility along with motivating them emotionally through homework involvement.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards parental involvement have an influence on developing and sustaining parents' involvement in education. The teachers' awareness of different activities determines the possibility of partnership that they could carry out with the parents; moreover, the teachers and parents may come together and use similar strategies in order to achieve mutual goals (Moosa, Karabenick & Adams, 2001; Souto-Manning & Kevin, 2006). In other words, the teachers who are aware of the importance of parental involvement and its' meaning use several strategies for improving parents' involvement in education such as calling and e-mailing home, sending newsletters home, setting up websites for their students etc. (Pakter & Chen, 2013). Christianakis (2011) investigated parental involvement from the teachers' point of view through narratives. She revealed that the teachers saw the parents as supportive figures for their course objectives rather than partners working collaboratively. In Turkish context, Hakyemez (2015) examined early childhood educators' beliefs about parental involvement. She found out that the teachers gave importance to parental involvement, especially to home support, yet she reported that parental involvement was ineffective because of the parents' unwillingness to participate.

When it comes to the influence of parental involvement on second language (L2) development, previous research suggests that parental involvement has a considerable effect on children's L2 learning and development (Panferov, 2010; Xuesong, 2006). Parental involvement affects children's L2 achievement motivationally, affectively, socially and cognitively (Fear, Emerson, Fox, & Senders, 2012). On the other hand, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) state that parents' perceptions may affect the efficiency of parental involvement adversely. To illustrate, they may afraid of involving their children's education because of their lack of knowledge in the field. Nevertheless, Castillo and Gamez (2013) use the analogy "...a parent can teach a kid to ride a bike even if he/she does not know how to ride." to refute the parents' claim about their lack of involvement resulting from their lack of knowledge. In other words, they argue that the parents can contribute to their children's L2 development even if they cannot speak the target language. In a nutshell, parent-school partnership makes the students feel more comfortable socially and emotionally, which influence students' success positively (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). By the same token, parents' activities taken as a part of parental involvement may affect L2 development directly or indirectly (Üstünel, 2009).

Previous research on parental involvement in relation with English language education reflected that parents believed their involvement had a significant influence on children's achievement (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016; Mahmoud, 2018). On the other hand, previous research also revealed that parents' actual involvement was not sufficient although they were aware of its significance (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016). From a more general perspective, Niehaus and Adelson (2014) explored the relationship among school support, parental involvement and social, emotional and academic outcomes for children's English language development. They reported that parental involvement was directly linked to school support and higher level of parental involvement decrease anxiety, which increased students' achievement.



### **3. Purpose of the Study**

The major objective of this study is to find out Turkish parents' perceptions about parental involvement. The study also aims to explore the relationship between parental involvement level and variables such as parents' gender, educational background and level of proficiency in English. For this reason, this research seeks to address following research questions:

- 1) How do parents get involved in their children's English learning process?
- 2) Do parents have different levels of involvement with regard to their gender, age, educational background or level of English?

### **4. Method**

#### **4.1. Setting and Participants**

The participants of the present research included the parents of the students studying at the 1st to 4th grades of a private primary school in Ankara. Out of 180 parents, 123 of them (Male: 31; Female: 92,  $M = 39$ ,  $SD = 4.80$ ) voluntarily participated in the research. Their age ranged from 33 to 66 ( $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = .43$ ). In the second phase of the study, 10 of the participants also volunteered to be interviewed for further investigation.

#### **4.2 Instrumentation**

This research was designed as a sequential explanatory study, which has two alternating phases; namely, quantitative methodology was followed by a qualitative one for data triangulation.

The first phase of the study was conducted in the form of a survey, which aims at not only finding out their level of involvement in relation to their demographic features but also identifying the Turkish parents' perceptions of their involvement in children's education. We have adapted Mahmoud's (2018) survey that consists of 29 items for three categories of parental involvement: (i) relation with teachers, (ii) the nature of academic help parents can give to their kids at home, and (iii) logistic indirect help for kids. Additionally, the instrument includes a section on parents' demographic information which helped the researchers investigate the relation between parents' demographic characteristics and their school involvement. The original scale is 29 item likert scale with 4 ratings (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=always); however, we have added an extra item and rated items on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=never, 2= rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=usually, 5=always). We have used forward and backward translation to create Turkish-language forms of the measures. Two proficient translators translated the survey into Turkish as the first step. Secondly, a reconciled version on the basis of the two forward translations was produced with a report explaining the decision process. Then, backward translation was done by a proficient translator and compared with the original one. Lastly, the translated version of the questionnaire was piloted with five participants and validated linguistically.

A semi-structured interview constituted the second phase of the study. It consisted of questions related to parents' opinions about their involvement in the children's English language education. These questions were addressed to the parents to get a deeper understanding of their perceptions.

#### **4.3 Data Collection Procedures**

The questionnaires were sent to the parent with children after they were informed about the research project and the types of the questions they need to answer ensuring them the confidentiality of the personal information. After filling out the questionnaires, the parents sent them back. After analyzing the results of the questionnaires, we passed the second part of the

study and asked parents whether they will participate in an interview for further investigation. In the second part of the study, 10 of the participants were invited to take part in a 10-minute, semi-structured interview voluntarily for further investigation. They were asked five main questions in relation to the questions in the survey. We arranged the time at their convenience and did the interviews at school. Through interviews, we aim at understanding the parents' beliefs about the parental involvement and their perceived effects on English language education of their children.

#### 4.4 Data Analysis Procedures

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in the data analysis. Quantitative data analysis was carried out to address the research questions formulated for the present study. The data were analysed using IBM SPSS 23 statistical package. To begin with, the participants' scores were computed to obtain the perfect scores for all three subscales. Next, frequency, percentages and means were employed to obtain and characterize the participants' perceived levels of parental involvement in their children's educational development. The independent-samples T-test was used to find out the role of gender differences in the participants' perceptions of parental involvement in children's educational development. Furthermore, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to find out if the participants differ in their perceptions of parental involvement in children's educational development with regard to such demographic factors as age, occupation, and level of education.

When it comes to the qualitative analysis, we first analysed transcripts for emerging themes and areas for further examination through inductive analysis from which the themes and concepts emerged. Inductive coding helped us to not only decrease the level of reliance on the questionnaire but also minimize our researcher bias. Secondly, we began the formal coding process and read all the transcripts line by line for general codes based on the recurrent concepts. Three main themes emerged including parents' perceived contribution to their children's English development, homework involvement and teacher-parent partnership. After the initial themes emerged, the transcripts were read again in order to provide supporting excerpts and they were categorized for detailed investigation.

### 5. Results

This section presents the results of the current study in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics.

The analysis of percentages of responses to the first subscale items, Table 1, revealed general tendency toward "always", "usually" and "sometimes" in all items except for items 2 "*Teachers phone me when my child misses an assignment or does poorly in exams*" and 6 "*I get a teacher to tutor my kid if he has gaps in certain areas*", emphasizing on the teachers' being indifferent ( 61% ) to their students' sense of responsibility and their poor performance at school on one hand and parents' lack of interest (47%) in their children's school performance and achievement on the other.

Table 1. Percentages of responses for the first subscale

| Items | The Relation with Teachers                                                               | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|
|       |                                                                                          | %      | %       | %         | %      | %     |
| 1     | I keep in touch with teachers                                                            | 18     | 38      | 31        | 13     | 0     |
| 2     | Teachers phone me when my child misses an assignment or does poorly in exams.            | 9      | 18      | 12        | 26     | 35    |
| 3     | I let the teacher know I am watching my child's study habits and attitude towards school | 22     | 41      | 27        | 9      | 1     |
| 4     | I ask the teacher how I can support my child in areas he/she may need to improve.        | 20     | 38      | 29        | 10     | 2     |
| 5     | I share any information that might help the teacher understand my child                  | 18     | 40      | 28        | 9      | 5     |
| 6     | I get a teacher to tutor my kid if he has gaps in certain areas.                         | 15     | 16      | 22        | 24     | 23    |
| 7     | I thank the teacher when I appreciate something he has done for my child.                | 57     | 33      | 9         | 1      | 0     |
| 8     | The first man to consult is the teacher if my child is struggling with homework.         | 58     | 29      | 7         | 4      | 1     |
| 9     | I make sure that my teaching strategies go with the teachers' strategies.                | 26     | 41      | 20        | 11     | 2     |

In the rest of the items, as shown in Figure 1, positive relationship with teachers exchange dominance among “always”, “usually” and “sometimes”, with items 7, 8, 3, 4, 9, 5, and 1 presenting the highest frequencies, respectively. Careful analysis of the percentages, Table 2, further revealed that nearly 6 out of ten (57%) of the parents always appreciate the teachers' help and contributions to their children's school performance (item 7) and, in the same vein, 58% of them always prefer to consult with the teachers whenever they find their children struggling with homework assignments at home.

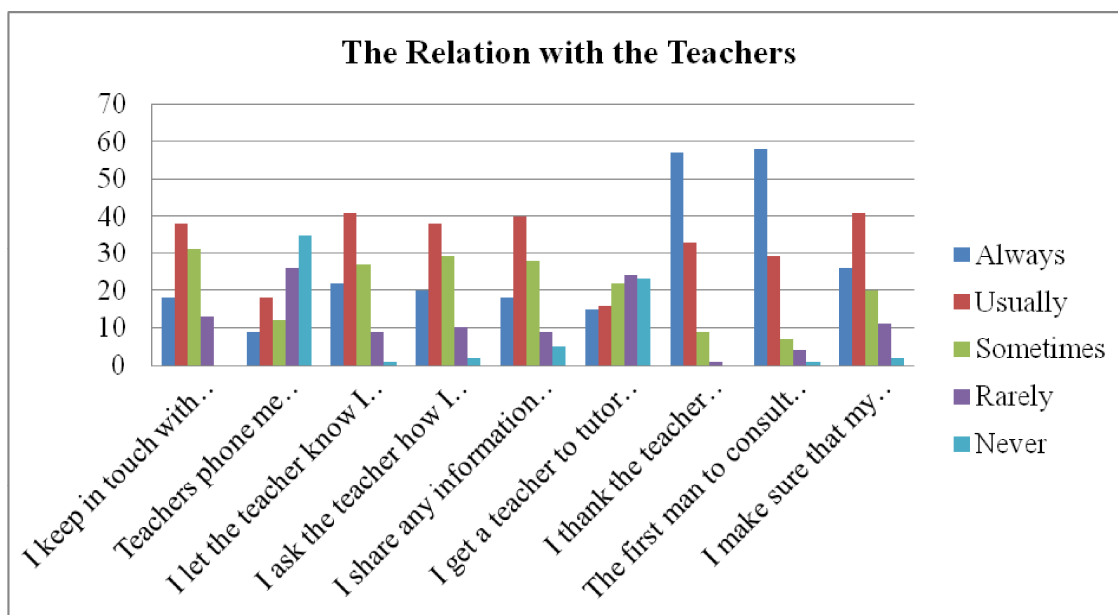


Figure 1. Percentages of responses for the relation with the teachers

As for the responses of the participants' for the second subscale, the analysis of the percentages of responses, Table 2 and Figure 2, showed great tendency toward "always", "usually" in items 1,5,6,7,8 with the highest percentage for item 6 (92%) "*I watch my children for signs of frustration or failure. I let them take a break or talk through difficulties*", indicating that the respondents have a close eye on their children and provide help whenever they notice the signs of frustration or failure. With regard to items 2, 3, and 4, which emphasize on providing instant help for the kids, the results showed a huge shift to either "sometimes" (40% on the average) and/or "Rarely" and "Never" (25% in items 2 and 4 and 53% in item 3).

Table 2. *Percentages of responses for the second subscale*

| Items | The nature of the help parents give to their kids                                                                  | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|
|       |                                                                                                                    | %      | %       | %         | %      | %     |
| 1     | Whenever he has a difficult word in English I give him the Turkish meaning.                                        | 29     | 50      | 15        | 6      | 0     |
| 2     | I make him read texts and give him the Turkish translation.                                                        | 13     | 25      | 37        | 19     | 6     |
| 3     | When he can't answer comprehension questions I answer for him.                                                     | 3      | 12      | 32        | 29     | 24    |
| 4     | I give him the instructions in Turkish                                                                             | 11     | 22      | 41        | 19     | 6     |
| 5     | I encourage my child to work independently. If my child asks for help, I listen and provide guidance, not answers. | 24     | 50      | 17        | 7      | 2     |
| 6     | I watch my children for signs of frustration or failure. I let them take a break or talk through difficulties.     | 46     | 46      | 6         | 2      | 0     |
| 7     | I have my children do harder work first, when they are most alert. Easier work will seem to go faster after that.  | 32     | 40      | 19        | 6      | 3     |
| 8     | I check my child's diary to know his assignments every day.                                                        | 39     | 32      | 16        | 11     | 2     |

These findings indicate that the respondents are aware of the importance of students' involvement and their relative independence while performing tasks and doing their homework assignments. This awareness is also vivid in item 5 in which nearly 90% encourage independent work and prefer to give indirect help and guidance rather than direct answers to their kids' questions. Unlike item 1 where more than 90% give the L1 equivalents of difficult words, the respondents avoid giving L1 translations and instructions since it seems that they know these behaviors are considered as inappropriate by the teachers and practitioners and are also inconsistent with educational theories.

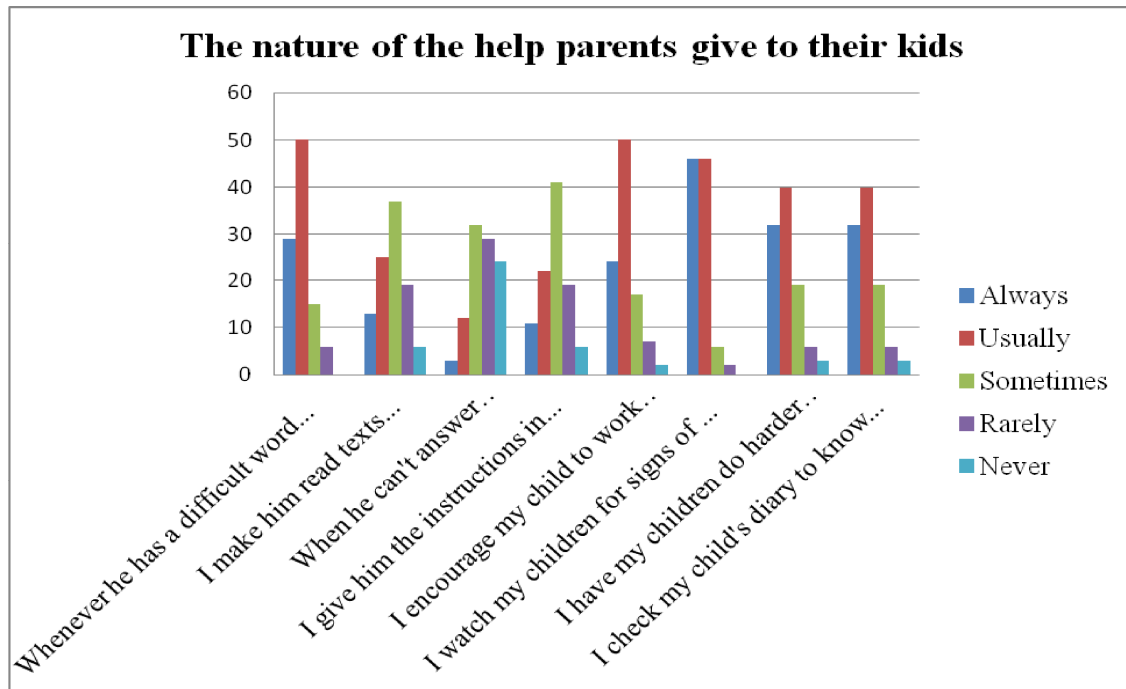


Figure 2. The nature of the help parents give to their kids

Finally, the analysis of percentages of responses for the third subscale, i.e. the logistic and indirect help parents give to their kids, (nearly 90%) had positive attitudes toward providing logistic and indirect help for their kids except for the item 5 “*I make daily study time a “family value,” something each child does with or without homework assignments from school*” where 31% of the parents reported that they don’t make daily study time a ‘family value’ for their children’s activities at home.

Table 3. Percentages of responses for the third subscale

| Items | Logistic and indirect help parents give to their kids                                                                 | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|
|       |                                                                                                                       | %      | %       | %         | %      | %     |
| 1     | I join SMS groups with parents to follow up with assignments and exams.                                               | 36     | 35      | 15        | 11     | 3     |
| 2     | I attend PTA meetings to give suggestions and discuss ideas related to improving teaching strategies.                 | 48     | 28      | 9         | 7      | 8     |
| 3     | I take time to understand my children’s world— their friends, activities, etc.                                        | 53     | 39      | 6         | 0      | 2     |
| 4     | I go with my children to places where learning is a family activity.                                                  | 47     | 38      | 11        | 3      | 1     |
| 5     | I make daily study time a “family value,” something each child does with or without homework assignments from school. | 11     | 17      | 41        | 23     | 8     |
| 6     | I make sure the home environment is welcoming and motivating to study.                                                | 33     | 50      | 14        | 3      | 0     |

|    |                                                                                                               |    |    |    |    |   |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|---|
| 7  | I establish a family routine with regular mealtimes, bedtimes, homework time, and outdoor play/exercise time. | 37 | 34 | 24 | 5  | 0 |
| 8  | I show and model courtesy when talking with my children by using please, thank you.                           | 54 | 39 | 7  | 0  | 0 |
| 9  | I spend a few minutes daily with each child, talking and listening with patience and love.                    | 63 | 31 | 4  | 2  | 0 |
| 10 | I praise my child for real effort and good attitudes about school work.                                       | 72 | 26 | 2  | 0  | 0 |
| 11 | I pick a time when my children will study each evening; I don't let them wait until just before bedtime.      | 37 | 42 | 12 | 7  | 2 |
| 12 | I try to do some of my own "homework" while my child studies, such as bill paying, reading, and writing.      | 18 | 29 | 32 | 15 | 6 |

The high percentages of positive attitudes toward giving logistic and indirect help, Table 3 and Figure 3, indicates that parents understand and value the importance of providing indirect help in teaching and learning process. More specifically, 100% of the parents try to show and model courtesy while talking to their children and also preferred to praise them for their real effort and positive attitudes toward school work. Finally, nearly 98% tend to understand their children's world, provide a welcoming and motivating home environment for them, and spend time with each child, talking and listening with patience and love.

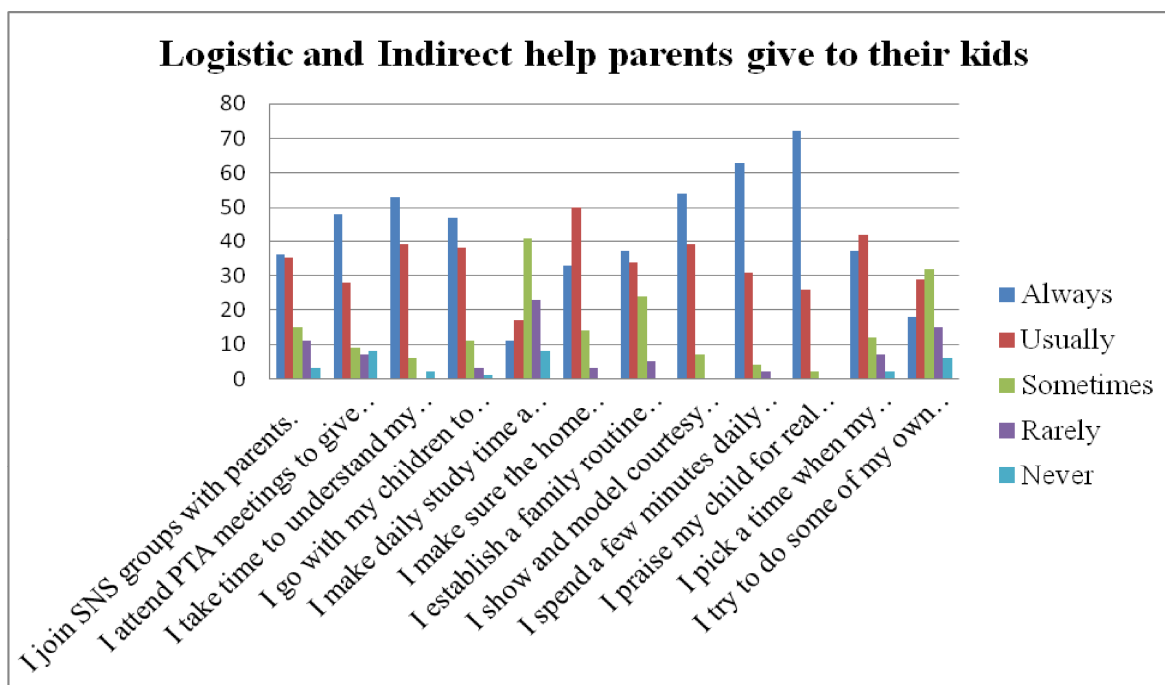


Figure 3. Logistic and indirect help parents give to their kids

An independent samples t-test was run to find out if there is a difference in participants' perceptions of parental involvement in students' educational development with regard to gender factor. The findings revealed no statistically significant difference among the

participants in terms of their perceptions of parental involvement in students' educational development since the p-value was larger than 0.05. However, the results of item by item analysis of the responses revealed significant differences among the participants in items 8 "*The first man to consult is the teacher if my child is struggling with homework*",  $t(121) = 2.22, p = .037$ , and 9, "*I make sure that my teaching strategies go with the teachers' strategies*",  $t(121) = 2.52, p = .005$ , of the first subscale, i.e. the relation with teachers, with females having greater mean scores, ( $M = 4.50, SD = .79$ ;  $M = 3.92, SD = .97$ ) than males ( $M = 4.12, SD = .99$ ;  $M = 3.32, SD = 1.07$ ) in items 8 and 9, respectively.

Regarding the second subscale, i.e. the nature of the help parents give to their kids, the participants differed in their perceptions only in item 3 "*When he can't answer comprehension questions I answer for him*",  $t(121) = 2.12, p = .035$ , with males having higher mean score ( $M = 2.77, SD = 1.23$ ) than females ( $M = 2.30, SD = 1.30$ ). Finally, the findings revealed a statistically significant difference among the participants in their perceptions of 'logistic and indirect help parents give to their kids', the third subscale, only in item 12 "*I try to do some of my own homework while my child studies, such as bill paying, reading, and writing*",  $t(121) = -2.54, p = .01$ , with females having higher mean score ( $M = 3.52, SD = 1.10$ ) than males ( $M = 2.93, SD = 1.12$ ).

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also conducted to see if the participants differ in their perceptions of parental involvement in students' educational development with regard to age factor. The findings revealed no statistically significant differences among the participants since in all subscales and items the p-value was greater than .05,  $P > .05$ . In the same vein, the results of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) demonstrated no significant difference in the participants' perceptions of parental involvement in students' educational development in terms of occupation and level of education.

In the content analysis of the interviews, three key themes emerged regarding the parents' perceptions about the level and effect of their involvement in their children's English language education. The main themes are *their contribution to their children's English development*, *homework involvement* and *parent-teacher partnership*. First, parents' contribution to children's English development describes to what extent parents engage in English language education and the activities they do together with their children in order to assist language development. It also explains the parents' perceptions about their influence on the children's English development. Second, homework involvement describes how they do English homework at home, the strategies the parents use for assisting the process and their perceptions about the effect of homework on the students' English development. Lastly, parent-teacher partnership describes the level and efficiency of parent-teacher partnership. These themes are dealt with in detail in the following section.

### **Parents' contribution to children's English development:**

Parents believe that they have an influence on their children's English development; however, 5 out of 10 argue that their involvement does not create a significant difference on their children's English development. They attribute the children's success to their teacher and state that their role cannot go beyond the revision of the language structures and vocabulary. In the same direction, they state that only the pace of English development could be affected adversely if they do not engage in the process. On the other hand, all of them have mentioned various activities that they do with their children in order to foster their children's English development. They have also mentioned the importance of the language exposure for the development of English. To illustrate, they mention listening to English songs and watching English cartoons with their children. One of them states that they read English books together for contributing to his daughter's reading skills. In addition to these activities, they give



examples about how they study English so as to revise the vocabulary and the structures that the children have learned in the school. They also touch on the games that they play with the flashcards which their teacher has provided. 5 out of 10 parents mention the importance of learning English for their children and how they explain its importance to their children. Moreover, they indicate that they try to enhance children's motivation by mentioning how they will need English in their real life. Three of the parents reflect their desire to talk or learn English with their children. Two of them express that their English is improving thanks to their children and one of them states that she is trying to develop her English skills in order to be beneficial for her daughter. To sum up, the parents believe that they have a fair amount of contribution to their children's English development. On the other hand, they indicate that the children can learn the language without their involvement since they only affect the pace of the development with the revision activities along with the activities making the children expose to the language to some extent. The following two quotations highlight the parents' perceptions about the level they contribute the children's English development:

*"We could only contribute her English by supporting her learning process since she does not learn English with us. To illustrate, I try to create an environment in which we talk in English, yet it lasts for maximum 2 days. We could not manage to continue talking in English and turn back to the natural. However, we revise the vocabulary and structures that she has learned at school. (...) Therefore, I think she learns English effectively at school. Even if we do not support, she will learn. She may forget some of the vocabulary but she could remember with a brief revision."*

Similarly, another participant has expressed:

*"I could say that Doğa will eventually learn English even if we give up studying with flashcards, watching English cartoons or I do not engage in the process. However, I believe that the pace of her learning will be affected adversely in such a situation."*

Although parents assert that their involvement does not influence their children's language development significantly, they have mentioned the various activities for reinforcing the children's language development, which is exemplified in the following quotation:

*"As I have mentioned, we make her watch English movies which I give importance to have subtitles, in this way she could see the spelling of the vocabulary she hears. It will contribute to her English development since she has a good visual memory, to me. When we are in the car, I switch on TRT World in order to make her expose to English. She prefers to watch cartoons in English and she does not demand to watch Turkish cartoons. Apart from these, we have tried to read English books having a few sentences. I mean easy ones. I have seen that we could manage this, as well."*

### **Homework Involvement:**

All of the parents state that they assist their children while doing homework. Four of the parents argue that they try to make their children do the homework on their own; therefore, they only guide them when the child could not understand the instruction as it is exemplified in the following quotation:

*"I want her to read and understand the instructions while doing homework such as circle, match etc. so that she could study on her own without our help. There is no sense when I say everything."*

The others, on the other hand, express that they participate in the whole process. They not only guide the children but also assist their spelling and pronunciation skills.

*“As for video homework, I, firstly, explain the demands of the teacher and we talk about how to do it. Then, we prepare the sentences together and record the video. When it comes to the written homework, we usually help her as she struggles. When I guide her, she can understand easily. In other words, she can continue to do the exercise after we help in a few examples.”*

All of the parents reflect their discomfort with the translation; however, they all admit that they give the Turkish meaning of the sentences when the children have difficulty in understanding English. Two of the parents express their pleasure with English homework by indicating that they take the homework as an extension activity and try to exemplify the vocabulary and structures in different ways in order to extend their children's understanding about the topic and grammatical structures. Another prominent issue parents touch upon is that they hesitate the strategies they use while helping their children since they cannot be sure whether they affect their children's English development in a positive way or mislead them. The following quotation shows their hesitation clearly:

*“Since I do not have enough quality in English and other foreign languages, I may mislead or confuse my child. To illustrate, the teacher may have a strategy to teach particular subjects and I could follow a different path for the same subject, which may cause confusion for him.”*

### **Parent-Teacher Partnership:**

Eight of the parents believe that the teacher will interact with them if there is a problem or they can reach the teacher if they need any help. Six of the parents reflect that the teacher's guidance and feedback are sufficient for them by stating they do not request anything else for involvement or partnership. The quote given below reveals the nature of parent-teacher partnership in parents' eyes:

*“I try to follow the teachers' guidance. Because of my job, I confess that I could not spare enough time to my daughter in terms of her education. However, the feedbacks that the teachers give when I talk to them assist me supporting the process.”*

Two of them indicate that they hesitate to make the children frustrated. Three of the parents reflect their desire for involvement; however, two of them expect guidance from the teacher in order to have mutual strategies for enhancing their children's English development and the other one ascribes the lack of partnership to his irresponsibility. The quotation given below illustrates the desire of parents' for setting up more efficient partnership with the teacher:

*“Eventually, we would be on the same wavelength and I would not struggle to show empathy towards the teacher. Our partnership will support us and improves the education process. Also, it prevents the conflicts between the parents and the teacher.”*

## **6. Discussion**

Parental involvement includes a variety of practices that the parents could implement. One of the most significant practices is to construct partnership with the teachers since it reinforces the students' achievement and promotes the quality of education (Akkok, 1999; Mafa & Makuba, 2013). The findings of the survey regarding the parents' relation with the teachers indicate that there is a high level of information exchange between parents and the teachers, which is in consistence with findings of the previous research (Akkok, 1999; Mahmoud, 2018). On the other hand, the parents have responded to the two of the questions negatively in the present study. Based on the findings, it can be suggested that teachers are indifferent to their students' sense of responsibility and their poor performance at school along with parents show lack of interest in their children's school performance and achievement. However, the

qualitative findings refute these assumptions as eight of the parents have mentioned that the teacher get in contact with the parents not only when there is a problem and need for help but also in order to guide and give feedback to them. This point of view may lead us to the assumption that parents often expect the teachers' invitation in order to engage educational process as the results of previous research verifies (Anderson & Minke, 2007). When it comes to the second assumption, the parents have highlighted their hesitation of making the students frustrated. In other words, the parents are afraid of making students fed up with studying English. This point of view makes us to infer that parents are aware of the psychological aspects of the education. Therefore, they try to avoid possible negative influences of their over-engagement in the children's education, more specifically English language development. This inference is in line with Al-Mahrooqi et al.'s (2016) study revealing parents' awareness of academic, psychological and social influences of parental involvement. However, parents believe in the positive effect of their involvement on students' different educational outcomes in their study.

In respect to the academic assistance that the parents provide for their children, quantitative results show that the parents are conscious of the importance of students' independent and responsible behaviors while studying since the parents have indicated that they encourage the children work independently. In the same vein, both quantitative and qualitative results show that the parents tend to guide the children while studying rather than giving direct answers of the questions. This result is compatible with the previous studies (Cunha et al., 2015). Secondly, the parents are aware of the adverse effects of giving L1 translations and instructions. Qualitative findings suggest the parents believe that they do not have a fundamental effect on children's English development although they implement various activities together for reinforcing their English development. When we handle both qualitative and quantitative results together, the parents' may underestimate their participation in English language development since the quantitative research findings indicate that they have positive attitude to participation besides the activities they mention throughout the interviews. This argument may be explained with Erdener and Knoeppel's (2018) result revealing that parents are in the opinion that education is school's job even though they accept parents' positive influence on children's achievement. Our qualitative findings verify this argument. Thus parents attribute their children's achievement to the teacher. In the same vein, the parents indicate that they not only prefer to consult the teachers struggling with the homework but also expect teachers' guidance so as to involve more efficiently in the process. Therefore, the possible implication for this finding might be that the teachers should be aware of the parents' expectations and guide them for efficient teacher-parent partnership (Pena, 2000; Xuesong, 2006)

As for the logistic and indirect help parents give to their children, all of them recognized the significance of providing indirect help in teaching and learning process. At the same time, almost all of them highlighted their inclination to understand their children's world, provide a welcoming and motivating home environment for them and spend time with the children, talking and listening to them in patience and love. This finding is in agreement with not only Mahmoud's (2018) result but also Şad and Gürbüztürk's (2013) finding, suggesting that parents often provide a reinforcing environment for their children at home so as to assist their learning.

When it comes to the relationship between parents' demographic characteristics and their perceptions about parental involvement, the results suggest no statistically significant difference in terms of gender factor. On the other hand, detailed investigation regarding the relation with the teacher unearthed that female participants have more tendency to consult the teacher when struggling with the homework and they attach more importance to have similar strategies with the teacher. As for the academic help they give to their children, the male

participants tend to give direct answers of the questions when the children could not answer compared to female parents. Lastly, the findings found out a statistically significant difference in parents' perceptions of logistic and indirect help they give to their kids. Namely, females have higher mean score than males in terms of doing their homework while the children are studying. With regard to the age factor, the findings revealed no statistically significant difference among participants' perceptions of their involvement in children's education. In the same direction, their perceptions do not vary according to the occupation or level of education. These findings are in line with those of several studies (Hakyemez, 2015; Şad & Gürbüzürk, 2013; Tekin, 2011) while differing from Erdener and Knoepfel's (2018) results claiming that these demographic features influence parental involvement significantly; that is, educated parents get more involved in education.

## **7. Conclusion**

The current study sought to investigate Turkish parents' perceptions about parental involvement in English language education. To begin with, findings suggest that they have a positive attitude towards parental involvement and they are generally aware of the academic and psychological aspects of education. As for the parent-teacher partnership, they believe that there is an efficient relationship with the teacher. Moreover, they see the teacher as an expert; therefore, they not only consult him/her in case of need but also expect guidance. With respect to their involvement, they look down on their contribution to their children's English development even though not only quantitative findings refute this idea but also the various activities they implement according to the qualitative results in order to enhance children's English. When it comes to the academic help they offer, they are conscious of the significance of homework responsibility and autonomous work since most of them only provide guidance while the children doing homework. Regarding the indirect and logistic help they give to their children, the parents attach importance to it as much as the direct help they could offer like helping the children's homework. Finally, demographic characteristics such as gender, age, occupation or level of education, generally, make no significant difference on parents' perceptions about parental involvement although some of them may influence different aspects of their involvement.

This research has only focused on the parents' perceptions about their involvement in language education. Teachers' perspectives could be examined for further investigation. Therefore, the nature of their partnership could be understood for developing more effective strategies in order to enhance teacher-parent partnership. The present study is conducted in a private school. Since previous research suggests the profound influence of socio-economic level on parental involvement (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018), this research may be replicated in different contexts and state schools including this variable to find out the influence of socio-economic status's on the parental involvement in L2 development. Lastly, parents' perceptions may change over the time as their children grow. Therefore, this research could be implemented again with the parents' of children in different age groups.

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, the results may vary in different contexts since the data of the study was collected in a private school in which the parents' demographic characteristics are somewhat similar. Secondly, it focuses on parents' perceptions without measuring the academic, social or psychological outcomes of parental involvement for children's English development. Consequently, the parents may be mistaken about the effects of their involvement. Also, the teachers may perceive this process in a different way. Thus their perceptions need to be investigated for drawing a clearer picture of the influence of parental involvement.



# Qualitative inquiry on parental involvement in children's education: perspectives of parents, children, and teachers in select elementary schools in the Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative inquiry looking into the experiences of parental involvement in the context of Philippine public elementary education. This paper has two goals. First, it aims to present the strategies that Filipino parents employ in order to influence children's education. Second, it aims to examine unique involvement strategies among Filipino parents. Data of this paper were culled from 12 focus group discussions conducted in 5 provinces of the country. The results of the study suggest that there are parental involvement strategies unique to the Philippine context owing to the poor economic conditions of some Filipino families. While it is not directly related to education, making ends meet and providing food for the family's table were seen as parental involvement strategies. To compensate for the limited direct involvement in education, Filipino parents looked for other means to be able to help their children excel such as exempting the latter from doing household chores, avoiding vices, and maintaining quality family relationships. It against this backdrop that this paper recommends that future quantitative studies on parental involvement in the Filipino parents' context need to consider indirect parental involvement strategies as indicators or variables as these may have spillover impacts on children's schooling.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 25 March 2019  
Accepted 1 August 2020

## KEYWORDS

Parental involvement;  
Filipino parents; parental  
strategies; children's  
education

## Introduction

Parental involvement can be defined in many ways. Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, and Aubey (1986) define parental involvement as "the actual or perceived expectations for performance, verbal encouragement or interactions regarding homework, direct reinforcement for academic improvement, and general academic guidance and support." Meanwhile, Bakker and Dennesen (2007) define the term to refer to "parents' behaviours related to the child's school or schooling that can be observed as manifestations of their commitment to their children's educational affairs" (p. 188). Epstein and Salinas (2004), prominent figures in the study of parental involvement, classified parental involvement into six types, namely, parenting for children's education, home-school communication, parents as volunteers in school activities, participation of parents in home learning, decisions making participation at school, and community collaborations.

Most studies on parental involvement are highly quantitative in nature especially in the field of educational sociology. This is quite understandable given the field's epistemological and ontological leanings. Given the complex nature of parental involvement, it is expected that parental involvement can be operationalized using diverse indicators. Greenwood and Hickman (1991), for instance,



classify parental involvement in terms of roles, namely, parents as audience, volunteers, paraprofessionals, teachers, learners, and decision-makers. Some studies on parental involvement examined such a concept in terms of the space or the field where the engagement happens, either at home or in school (Abel, 2012; Nguon, 2012).

Parental involvement as a subject of investigation is increasingly gaining momentum although in relative terms studies on the subject remained few (Garcia, 2018) at least in the Philippines. Examples of these studies include parental involvement in children's assessment (Orillosa & Magno, 2013), parental involvement in the education of grade six pupils and their reading ability using Epstein's Model (Verdan and Tarisan, 2013), parental involvement and student readiness in Mathematics in the secondary schools (Esmana & Carpiano, 2013), a literature review on parental involvement in the Philippines (Bartolome, Mamat, & Masnan, 2017), enhancing academic performance through parental involvement strategies (Saquilabon & Abulon, 2016), importance, barriers, and benefits of parental involvement in child's education (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014), and a phenomenological inquiry on parental involvement among low-income Filipinos (Garcia, 2018).

Studies on parental involvement offer similar and contradicting results as regard to its impacts on academic outcomes. Bakker and Dennesen (2007) argue that the contradictions can be attributed due partly to the "very complex and multi-dimensional" nature of parental involvement. Traditional conception of parental involvement only considers actions or behaviours done directly by parents to directly and indirectly influence children's outcomes. To provide a robust measurement of parental involvement, some scholars have resorted to triangulation of subject in their studies. This means that instead of focusing on the perspective of parents alone, the views of other actors such as children themselves and teachers are now also being incorporated. However, Bakker and Dennesen (2007) maintain that this endeavour is not enough to address the gaps in terms of providing a holistic coverage of parental involvement indicators. Given this limitation, the authors suggested that a qualitative inquiry can be done to solicit ideas about what parents think regarding their behaviours in relation to their children's education including those what the two authors call the "hidden features of parental involvement."

Given this backdrop, this paper draws upon a qualitative research that was conducted in the Philippines aimed at exploring the understanding of public elementary school children, their parents (mothers in particular), and teachers as regard to parental involvement focusing on its perceived importance, parental involvement experiences, barriers and facilitating factors to parental involvement, and the impacts of parental involvement on children's education. Based on the results of such study, this paper seeks to explore different viewpoints and experiences of parental involvement as understood and experienced by the three actors, namely, teachers, parents, and children.

This paper argues that parental involvement among parents in low-income families may present different parental strategies owing to their financial limitations. As a qualitative research-based inquiry, this paper explores the potential impact of poverty in either facilitating or hindering parental involvement in children's education in the context of elementary education. Second, this paper explores unique strategies, if any, that Filipino parents employ to be involved in their children's schooling. The results of the study can perhaps offer new insights or indicators that researchers can consider in their research particularly those who will engage in parental involvement survey in the Philippines. There may be parental involvement strategies unique to the Filipino context due to culture, economic condition, and structural factors including institutional norms that shape and reshape parental involvement.

## **Parental involvement in other countries**

Parental involvement has been typically described to have two types, home based and school based. The article of Yamamoto, Holloway, and Suzuki (2016) maintained that parental engagement expectations in Japan and the US are somewhat similar in many aspects. Schools in the two countries expect that parents provide support to children in terms of homework completion and to present

avenues for intellectual stimulation through reading and visit to a museum. They also mentioned that Japanese schools are very clear about parental responsibility in helping children with their studies.

Jabar (2010) enumerated the ways in which Japanese parents involve in their children's education. Parents are expected to join the school orientation of their children. There are also annual events that parents can participate, namely, the annual presentation day or the *gakushuuhappyoukai*, *jiyogyouankan* or open school, and the *ondoukai* or school sports fest. Parents also volunteer as traffic patrols. They also participate in parents' projects like cooking class or recycling activities. Teachers also expect that parents to be present during the home visit or the *kateihoumon*.

In Ontario, Canada, a parent engagement policy was crafted. Ontario's vision of parental engagement underscores the role of parents as "partners and active participants in their children's education" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.7). The said policy requires schools to cultivate participation of parents through providing parents' leadership roles, inviting parents to field trips or asking them to volunteer in school activities, organizing parent-to-parent exchanges and parent-teacher meetings, urging parents to attend school activities like assemblies, performances, and sports events, and conducting workshops for parents to enhance parenting skills for education.

In Austrilia, a policy shift has been noted in terms of looking at parental involvement. Rather than looking at it as a peripheral component, parental involvement is seen as central element of children's education (Office of Non-Government Schools and Services, Government of South Australia, 2014). In the 1970s, parental involvement was viewed as "local representations to improve schooling." However, in the 1990s, a move to look at parents as active participants of school reforms was more evident. In Western Australia, for instance, the ministry of education provides resources online that will help parents enhance education-related communication with children. They urge parents "to support school policies and values, support activities of their children and getting involved when they are able to."

### **Social class differences in parental engagement**

A plethora of studies on parental involvement point out the crucial impact of sociodemographic characteristics on the performance of parents in relation to their children's education. The study of Cucchiara and Horvat (2009), for instance, revealed that parental involvement's influence on academic outcomes should be understood within a social context including income class. In their study, they found out that middle-class parents bring promise in terms of bringing in change leading to better academic outcomes for the students. Parental level of education, which can be a proxy variable for social class, was also seen to predict parental involvement (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009).

Parental involvement varies within and beyond the borders of a state. This happens as a result of differences in social class or economic living conditions (Yamamoto et al., 2016). These differences are even evident in affluent countries such as the United States and Japan. The study of Yamamoto (2013) suggested that middle-class mothers are more involved than their working-class mother counterparts.

Schools as reproducers of middle-class values tend to communicate more with parents from middle and higher economic status as they probably share the same values, beliefs and expectations. As a result, parents from lower income may not be afforded with equal attention so that they are less presented with opportunities for parental involvement. Berthelsen and Walker (2008) observed through their literature review that "families with more social and cultural capital tend to be more involved at school because these families are more comfortable with teachers and schools and are more likely to have supportive social networks." Meanwhile, a qualitative study done by Garcia (2018, p.3) on parental involvement among low-income Filipinos noted that "responses regarding



academic socialization, communicating with teachers, and volunteering in school reflect cultural beliefs and practices in the Philippines related to traditional parenting and extreme poverty.”

A number of quantitative studies on parental involvement have indeed provided compelling empirical evidence pointing to the impact of poverty on the ability of parents to be engaged in their children’s schooling. Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) described that low-income parents do not actively participate in children’s education as much as their high-income parent counterparts. Moreover, the work of Ermisch, Francesconi, and Pevalin (2001) maintained that parental engagement may be lower among parents in poverty as they may also set lower educational expectations for children. However, most quantitative studies have looked at income as a predictor of parental involvement. More than income indicator, it is also worthwhile to examine how nuanced experiences of poverty impact the ability of parents to be engaged in children’s education. While personal and family factors by and large deter or enhance parental involvement, school structures too may also play a role in facilitating or hindering parents’ ability to engage in children’s schooling. The study of Smit and Liebenberg (2003), for instance, noted that there are practices in schools that may indeed discourage parents in poverty to participate in children’s education.

### Elementary education in the Philippines

Elementary education in the Philippines, like elsewhere, involves 6 years of schooling. Elementary schools in the country are either public or private. In 2012–2013, there was a total of 46, 404 elementary schools operating all over the country, 38, 659 of which were public while 7, 745 were private (TeacherPh Website). There is practically one elementary school in every village or *barangay* – *smallest political unit*. A total of 14, 509, 690 students were enrolled in the SY 2012–2013.

Being compulsory, public elementary education in the Philippines is offered for free. Despite free education, some poor families have difficulty in bringing children to school because of lack of financial resources necessary for survival – buying food. In 2012, the per capita poverty threshold was 18, 935 pesos (Philippine Statistics Authority). That year, incidence of children belonging to poor families was at 35.2%. Enrolment in elementary education in 2016 reached 96.15%.

Children of families who cannot avail of relative advanced learning experience in private schools due to financial constraints would opt to enrol in public schools. Unlike in developed countries, the Philippines does not have a clear policy on parental involvement. Thus, the schools are quite independent as regard to their strategies in involving parents in children’s learning at home and in school. This is not, however, the case for early childhood education. In fact, one of the core competencies of child development teachers/workers (CDT/W) in early childhood education is to cultivate partnership or collaboration with parents and the community in general (ECCD, 2017). The competencies include CDW’s recognition of parents as first teachers, being able to establish positive relationship with families, present various activities for families to be involved in, partner with parents in monitoring children’s developmental milestones, and being able to tap resources and services from the community.

Like in other countries, elementary schools in the Philippines also organize parent–teacher associations (in other countries they call it as conference). The Department Order 54 of the Department of Education present guidelines regarding the parent-teacher associations (PTAs). The said order articulates the role of PTAs which is to “provide a forum for the discussion of issues and their solutions related to the total school programme and to ensure the full cooperation of parents in the efficient implementation of such programme.” It should be noted that the guiding principle does not articulate the role of such associations in cultivating parental involvement and ultimately in improving children’s outcomes. What is lacking in the policy is the clear definition of what a total school programme is all about. The said policy document also legitimizes voluntary contribution or collection from parents and guardians. The amount varies depending on the policies and guidelines of local government units and the Department of Education.

As a matter of policy, PTAs are not allowed to “interfere in the academic and administrative management and operations of the school, and of the Department of Education” (DO 54, series of 2009). When looking at the policy, one can notice that there seems to be a lack of recognition of the role of PTAs in cultivating parental involvement and ultimately in affecting the educational outcomes of children. There was an attempt to reform the PTAs in the country through the passing of House Bill 4104 (2016) which seeks to strengthen the role of PTAs in the country. The passing of the bill was inspired by the role of PTAs in promoting quality of education in the US, the UK, and in other Asian countries. The bills seeks to “ensure the active participation of the PTA in achieving the objective of education for all, as well as supporting the school administration in terms of school curriculum, facilities, and other related programmes. The PTAs may also be tapped to assist in concerns that affect the students, parents, and teachers and school administration relating to security of the school, calamity preparedness ...and the implementation of programmes that will redound to the benefit of all stakeholders in the education process.”

## Method

As earlier mentioned, the data of this paper emanated from a qualitative research looking into the involvement of Filipino parents in their children’s elementary education. This qualitative investigation is part and parcel of a larger research project commissioned by a private company in the Philippines. This private company offers financial assistance to children from poor families in public elementary and high schools in areas where they operate. As one of its corporate social responsibility initiatives, the company grants financial subsidy to children with the aim of positively impacting the latter’s academic performance. Apart from financial subsidy, the company also grants financial support for school infrastructures. The said study was commissioned with three major goals. First, the study aimed to evaluate the short-term impacts of the projects on students who received the financial grants. Second, as its needs assessment component, the study also explored the other needs of students and their families which could provide insights to the company regarding other programmes that could be offered in their partner communities. Third, it also solicited insights as regard to how parents can actively involve in their children’s education. Data for the first two goals were collected through a survey while data for the last goal was culled from focus group discussions. This paper, however, only covers the last goal which is to examine involvement experiences of parents in their children’s education.

Twelve focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in 5 areas in the Philippines coming from the three main islands, namely, Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. FGDs were conducted in Bulacan, Davao, Dumaguete, Misamis Oriental, and La Union because of the presence of the commissioning company in these areas. Using the triangulation of subject, the focus group discussions involved school children, parents, and teachers. The children participants are not necessarily related to the parent participants. Focus group discussions were done separately making sure that children will be able to confidently and candidly share their experiences. FGDs for parents (mostly were mothers) and teachers were also done separately. Many of the parent participants have low level of education. The parents are mostly coming from the low to middle-income families. Because of their limited financial means, they had to bring their children to public elementary schools to avail of free education.

Student FGD participants were identified by the teachers. Similarly, parents were also recruited by the teachers. Teacher participants were identified by their school principal. Children participants had to be either in grade 5 or grade 6. They were required to submit a child assent and parental consent to ensure that their participation is voluntary and that their parents have given the permission to participate. The child assent and parental consent forms were explained by the research assistants of the project. The children were then asked to bring the forms at home so they can discuss such undertaking with their parents. Parent and teacher participants were also given informed consent forms.

**Table 1.** Research sites of the study.

| Area             | Type of FGD       | Date          | Number of Participants |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Bulacan          | FGD with Teachers | 13 April 2015 | 8 Participants         |
|                  | FGD with Parents  | 27 March 2015 | 8 Participants         |
| Davao            | FGD with Students | 27 March 2015 | 9 Participants         |
|                  | FGD with Teachers | 27 March 2015 | 6 Participants         |
|                  | FGD with Parents  | 19 March 2015 | 7 Participants         |
|                  | FGD with Students | 19 March 2015 | 4 Participants         |
| Dumaguete        | FGD with Teachers | 19 March 2015 | 8 Participants         |
|                  | FGD with Parents  | 26 March 2015 | 7 Participants         |
|                  | FGD with Students | 26 March 2015 | 7 Participants         |
| Misamis Oriental | FGD with Parents  | 13 April 2015 | 8 Participants         |
|                  | FGD with Students | 13 April 2015 | 6 Participants         |
| La Union         | FGD with Parents  | 13 April 2015 | 6 Participants         |
|                  | FGD with Teachers | 13 April 2015 | 6 Participants         |

Prior to the start of the FGDs, all forms were collected. FGDs with parents and teachers ran for about an hour to 2 hours while FGDs with children ran for about 30 minutes to an hour. All FGDs were audio recorded with the participants' consent. All FGDs were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Table 1 shows the different FGDs that were conducted between March and April 2015. A total of 84 individuals participated in the different FGDs conducted. Thirty participants were parents, 28 were teachers, and 26 were school children.

To provide a relaxing climate during the FGDs, children were first asked to draw a picture depicting their future goals and aspirations. Their drawings were the starting point for discussion by asking them how education can help them achieve their aspirations and how these aspirations can be achieved in the future. They were also asked what they think about their parents' involvement in making these aspirations and goals a reality. Involvement in children in the study is a response to both research gap as well as the call to integrate children in research even young as they are.

FGDs were conducted either in Filipino or Cebuano. FGDs in Davao, Misamis Oriental, and Dumaguete were done in Cebuano while FGDs in La Union and Bulacan were conducted in Filipino. FGDs were held in public elementary schools. Initially, an FGD guide in English was prepared prior to the actual conduct of the discussions. After which, the guide was translated to both Filipino and Cebuano. Back translations of the guides from the local languages to English were also made to ensure consistency and reliability of the translations. A pilot test was likewise conducted to check if participants will be able to understand the questions and to examine coherence and logical sequencing of the questions. Because the tool served only as a guide, probing questions varied across the FGDs and some new questions emerged as a result of unique experiences of participants across the FGD groupings.

FGDs with children covered several topics and issues including difficulties or challenges in schooling, reasons why some children are dropping out, and the role of the government, community, and parents in children's education. FGDs with parents tackled their involvement in their children's education, school activities that they participated in, support they needed to be able to actively be involved in their children's schooling, and difficulties or challenges they encountered as they engage in their children's studies. Issues discussed during the FGDs with teachers include the various academic needs of students, teachers' needs to be able to effectively teach students and encourage parents to get involved, role of parental involvement in children's education, and the various opportunities that they present for parents to get involved in children's education.

As previously mentioned, most studies on parental involvement typically would only involve parents. Hence, some studies have recommended to include the various stakeholders including children and their teachers to fully capture a holistic understanding of such phenomenon. This study included children in recognition of their capacity to respond to questions and to relate with others their personal experiences despite their young age. According to Harcourt (2008), children have the capacity to tell their stories. As proposed by sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 1997), children are

competent and agentic individuals who can reflect and control their own lives or experiences. Corsaro (2005) maintained that children's participation in research or consultation should be a matter of right especially if the issue concerns them.

## Results

### *Children's parental expectations for education*

Children expect that their parents will be involved in their schooling in many ways. A common expectation of children is for their parents to provide them with the financial resources, so they can accomplish schoolwork and for them to be able to pay school miscellaneous fees. The children likewise recognized how difficult it is for parents to look for financial resources so that they will be able to pay their school requirements. One child mentioned that his parents would even borrow from others just for him to be able to submit academic outputs. The same sentiment was shared by a female child participant. She mentioned that her parents are trying their best to provide them the economic resources even if it would mean borrowing from someone.

Some children mentioned that they are supported by their parents through giving them money so they can do research in internet shops, buy the needed materials for their school projects, or as school allowance. Aside from economic resources, children recognized that their parents are involved in their schooling through providing them with food that will allow them to survive the day. Children likewise mentioned that their parents also get involved in their schooling by bringing them or accompanying them to school.

Another parental involvement that was seen by some of the children FGD participants is exempting them from doing household tasks especially during exams. One female child participant, for instance mentioned, "if I want to study, I really study. I really like when it is exam day because my parents are not going to ask me to do household task." According to the children FGD participants, their parents are also involved through helping them accomplish their assignments or school projects. They also mentioned that their parents explain difficult lessons for them.

It was also frequently mentioned in the FGDs with children that parents help them through giving motivations or encouragement. Oftentimes, they were told by their parents to study hard to have a better future and not be like their parents who did not finish schooling, and thus as a result, their life is hard at times. One female child participant shared, "my parents told me that they send me to school so that I will not be like them whose life is hard. They said I have to study hard so that if I have a family of my own, I will be able to provide them the resources."

Giving reminders was also seen as a parental involvement strategy. One child participant, for example, shared that his parents would ask him not to use Facebook and instead "face the book." Other parents, according to children, would remind them to review for their upcoming exams. Some children think that parent's employment or livelihood is a form of parental involvement. Though indirect, livelihood as a source of income would enable parents to provide children the monetary and non-monetary resources for their studies. Avoiding or not engaging in a vice was also seen as parental involvement since it will not affect the ability of parents to prioritize their children's educational concerns.

### *Parents' views on parental involvement*

Parents see the value of parental involvement in children's education. Across the FGDs, the parents admitted that they have to show concern to their children so that the latter will be able to finish schooling and move out of poverty. For these parents, education is a vital key to a good future. Parents also see themselves responsible for disciplining children. Some parents think that children are not performing well in school because other parents do not show concern.

One way to show concern, as recognized by the parents, is imposing some degree of control. Specifically, they think that this parental duty is relevant to their children's schooling. One rule that is being imposed at home is waking up early so that children will not be late from school. One parent even shared that she wakes her children up every day and remind them that waking up late is a bad habit.

Some parents thought that their involvement is only limited to financial resource provision. They thought that they must do all the means possible to be able to eke out a living and be able to provide funds for their children. In fact, some said that they even must sell chicken just to be able to sustain the educational needs of their children. One female parent participant, for instance, shared that they really have to provide school allowance to their children in order to increase motivation. She even shared an anecdote describing that some school children do not attend classes if they are not given school allowance. Other than giving money, some parents provide their children with resources like school materials and other personal needs like shoes and clothes. Other parents prepare school meal or snacks for their children, help their children dress for school, or prepare food for their children at home.

Monitoring children was also seen as a parental duty. Some parents monitor their children's lessons and assignments to ensure that the latter are able to accomplish their homework. Other parents check if their children are attending or skipping classes. Some parents are worried that their children do not report to school and instead spend time elsewhere (e.g., playing computer games in internet cafes). To ensure that their children attend classes, parents closely monitor their children's whereabouts. One parent, for example, had this to say,

" I monitor my child if he has done his assignments. I always remind him that he has to go to school because some school kids cut classes, or they go somewhere else instead."

Parents also see that explaining lessons and helping children understand lessons is a form of parental involvement. However, one parent mentioned that such involvement is only possible if they know the lessons or if they have the capacity to assist their children. For instance, one mother shared that she cannot help her child if the lesson concerns oral English. Some parents mentioned that they will explain to their children the lessons for easy comprehension, but they do expect that their children will make the assignment by themselves. Parents also declared that they especially help their children explain the lessons when the children themselves present them opportunities to help.

Another way that parents can participate in their children's education is through giving them motivation. One type of motivation is to encourage children to strive hard and to reiterate the importance of education in the future. Other parents motivate their children by telling them that they can do it and that everyone has the ability to excel if one chooses to. One mother mentioned, "we really follow up our children. We tell them this is what should be done. Tell them to strive harder because we know that they can even do more."

Parents also motivate their children to strive hard with their studies by citing their life experiences so that the later will realize the importance of education. Parents' experiences somehow became a driving force for them to motivate their children to take their education seriously. They attributed their hardships and their being poor because of their lack of education partly due to their own parents' failure to encourage them to go to school. In fact, as one parent participant claimed, it's her parent that even told her that she does not need to go to school.

One mother mentioned that she always reminds her child about their poor economic condition as a result of their being unable to get better and higher level of education. Another parent motivated her children by telling them how hard life is and that they should get education so that they will be moved out of the vicious cycle of poverty. She explained, "I really do not want my children to experience what I have experienced and have been experiencing. I really want to tell them that I do not want them to go through the same life ordeals."

Parental motivation in children's education can also be in terms of tangible rewards. For example, one parent mentioned that every time her child gets a medal, she buys her a gift. She narrated, "at

the end of the school year, if my child receives a medal, we always give him gifts.” Parents mentioned that despite their busy schedule, they really see to it that they join this school activities. PTA meeting was the most frequent activity that many parents participate in. Some parents see the importance of attending PTA meetings as they would know what the other parents think about school decisions. In addition, other parents attend school activities like the “brigada eskwela” or the back-to-school brigade. This is an activity where parents help teachers clean the classrooms prior to the start of a new school year.

Other activities that were attended by some of the parents were school feeding program, nutrition day celebration, activities related to the language month (Buwan ng Wika), Christmas party, parents’ day, family day, sportsfest, pageants for mothers, book parade, and quiz bee. Aside from attending school activities as volunteers, some of the parents said that they volunteer to become PTA officers.

### ***Teachers' views on parental involvement***

Teachers expect that parents will be visible and supportive to children’s schooling. To be able to inculcate this in parents, teachers do home visit or send notice whenever necessary to remind parents of their obligations. Some teachers call the attention of the parents especially those that are unresponsive. They lamented that even during home visits, some parents are not there to welcome them or they would see parents playing “bingo.”

As viewed by the teachers, one of the duties that parents should perform is monitoring their children. They said that parents need to follow-up and closely monitor the performance of their children especially their learning difficulties. Teachers expect that parents would look at the lessons of their children so they can assist in accomplishing them. One teacher noted that some children are unable to submit assignment because parents do not support them. Teachers see parents as their teaching partners or aides. They expect, that at home, parents will teach their children some basic skills. For instance, one teacher participant said that parents should teach children the basics of asking questions. According to this teacher, students nowadays do not know how to ask questions. Thus, she thought that this is the skill that should be developed first at home.

It was mentioned by the teachers that parental involvement does not have to be directly targeted to children’s schooling. They said that by simply making good family relationship, parents can provide a social environment conducive for learning. For the teachers, parents need to maintain quality family relationship as this will have spillover effects to children’s schooling. One teacher shared, “if the relationship of parents and children are sound, the children will not be wandering and instead are motivated to study.”

Teachers also expect that parents will engage in their children’s learning experiences through reading. They hope that parents will allot time for story telling so that they can assist in improving their children reading abilities. Teachers observed that children have difficulties with comprehension and communication because the latter do not have role models at home. Teachers thought that children do not see their parents reading and it is only at school that they are able to do so.

Teachers present avenues or activities that parents can engage at school. For example, some schools offer feeding program for children. While this is a school initiative, teachers expect that parents will volunteer to help in food preparation. Other schools promote school parental involvement through the “family day” or “family camp.” These activities are designed so that parents will be able to establish networks with teachers and other parents. More importantly, teachers see these activities as strategies to bring children closer to their parents.

### ***Hindrance to parental involvement***

One of the topics discussed during the FGDs with children, their parents, and their teachers was the factors that inhibit parents to involve in children’s education. For the children, they think that work or



employment inhibits parents from being involved in their schooling. One female child FGD participant, for instance, revealed that whenever she asks her parents to attend school activity, her parents tell her that they cannot do so because they must work in the farm for them to be able to eat.

Another hindering factor is the level of difficulty in children's lessons as identified by the parent FGD participants. While they would want to support their children, some of them are unable to do so because they cannot also understand their child's lesson. In fact, one parent mentioned that she needed to send message to her child's teacher just to clarify her child's assignment. Another mother said that she can teach her child if it will only require reading texts in English. But she feels constrained when her child would ask her to explain lessons in English. Similarly, the teacher FGD participants recognized that it will be difficult for some parents to help their children because of limited language ability.

Other inhibiting factors to parental involvement as cited by the children FGD participants include lack of family resources, family problems, lack of parental interest to involve, equating PTA meetings with school fees, maternal roles at home, and limited education. Teachers, meanwhile, pointed out that some parents do not teach their children. The parent FGD participants noted that some parents would simply complain but do not attend PTA meetings. The parents' hesitation to attend emanates from the belief that this will involve financial contribution.

### ***Facilitating factors to parental involvement***

One factor that will necessitate parents to get involved is when teachers present them opportunities or when they are required to attend. It was also shared that parents will be more involved in their children's schools when there are programs that will make them feel a sense of being part of the institution.

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) was an instrument for parents to become knowledgeable necessary for them to be able to teach their children. This is a mechanism provided to out-of-school youth and those who have not finished schooling to be able to access informal and non-formal education. In the FGD, it was noted that some parents were able to help their children because of their own educational experiences gained from being part of it.

According to teachers and parents, the conditional cash transfer program of the government has increased parental involvement as parents are obligated to do so. Failure to comply with requirements may inhibit parents from receiving their financial support from the conditional cash transfer program. Parents recognized the need for the government to provide livelihood programmes to increase their income. According to them, through livelihood, they will be supporting their family including children's school needs.

### ***Parent-related hindrances to children's education***

Parents can either make or break their children's education pursuits. This idea was evident in all the FGDs. Some children related that there are students who could not attend classes because their own parents would ask them to help in making ends meet. It was also mentioned that children are not motivated to perform well because of lack of parental support. While children may wish to strive hard but this enthusiasm dwindles when parents themselves do not show concern to their children. Similarly, the parent FGD participants also related that other parents are simply ignoring their responsibility to provide support to their children. In fact, it was mentioned that some parents would even tell their children to stop schooling for a while. Because of poverty, children are asked to stop as their parents are unable to provide them food.

The teacher FGD participants shared that some children are not motivated to excel because of personal family problems. In fact, one teacher narrated a story of a student who confided to him about family problems that deter the latter to concentrate on his studies. It was also mentioned that some parents are quite tolerant about the wishes of their children. The teachers also reported that some children cannot attend classes because they are being asked by their parents to watch over



their younger siblings or their parents cannot provide them money for transportation going to the school. The teachers likewise observed that some parents also do not know how to discipline children in terms of their sleeping habits.

During the FGDs, the various participants identified ways in which parents can be enticed to engage actively in their children's education. Children FGD participants mentioned that schools and communities can provide parenting sessions or seminars so that parents are guided on how they can best raise their children. It was likewise mentioned that some poorer families can be enlisted in the conditional cash transfer programme of the government (also known as the 4Ps or the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme – Bridging Programme for the Filipino Family). This programme provides cash assistance to indigent families with certain conditionalities including parents' attendance in family development sessions and strict implementation of children's compulsory attendance in school.

Children participants also recognized the need for their parents to engage in livelihood activities not only to sustain their daily living but also to impact their educational concerns. Teachers recommended that home visits may be done to encourage parents to participate in their children's affairs. To increase parental involvement in school activities, the teachers recommend that family school activities may be implemented. Parents, meanwhile, suggested that a group or circle among parents may be organized so that parents can talk with other parents about school concerns. In fact, in one of the FGDs with parents, one parent named this group as "Parents Helping Parents."

## Discussion

As can be gleaned from the focus group discussions, parental involvement strategies in the Filipino parents' context can be classified into either direct or indirect. Direct strategies included provision of material and financial resources for education and assistance in homework or schoolwork completion. Indirect strategies included exempting children from performing household tasks, maintaining good family relationships, avoiding vices, and eking out a living for the economic survival of the family. These results are indicative that that Filipino parents involved in the study were more engaged in parental involvement at home than in school. Their involvement strategies are rather not directly linked to education but somehow were perceived to have spillover impacts on children's learning outcomes.

The study findings resonate with Van Velsor and Orozco's (2007) findings which described that low-income parents do not actively participate in children's education as much as their high-income parent counterparts. Moreover, the work of Ermisch et al. (2001) similarly noted that parents in poverty do not impose high expectations in their children's education. This is partly due to the fact that parents in economically disadvantaged households are busy making ends meet. Hence, instead of allocating time for children's education, these parents are necessitated to earn income for the family's daily survival.

The above findings are consistent to the findings of Garcia (2018). The study of Garcia (2018), for instance, observed that parents in low-income families focused more on involving in children's education at home than in school. Despite their difficult economic situations, parents in low-income households try their best to assist their children even in ways that do not necessarily directly involve schooling.

When looking at the responses of the children, it seems that in parental involvement, children are receivers or recipients of tangible and intangible resources. In this structure of social relationships, the children somehow are the ones that reap whatever benefits or fruits that can be derived from the other social actors through social interactions. It may be that children would expect that their parents will provide them school allowance, prepare meals, bring them to school, exempt them from doing household tasks, accomplish homework, and most importantly for parents to eke out a living for them to be able to sustain their needs.

FGD results also provide an idea that the parent participants see themselves more involved in parenting for education. It was noted in the FGDs that parents are seen responsible for disciplining children, providing resources, monitoring children's lessons, checking child's school attendance, giving motivations, and attending PTA meetings. For the teachers, they see parents as their partners for education. In fact, they noted that they would expect parents to monitor their children's performance, provide support in accomplishing homework, serve as teacher's conduits for learning, teach life skills to children, spend reading time with children and attend school activities. Expectations of teachers for the parents are more directly linked to education compared to what children expect of their parents and what parents expect of themselves in relation to their children's education. Table 2 shows the comparison as regard to how the different actors view parental involvement and the different parental involvement strategies that were reported during the focus group discussions.

One interesting and important finding as revealed in the focus group discussions is the idea that maintaining quality of family relationship, while it is indirectly related to children's schooling, was seen a form of parental involvement. This is something rarely observe in many parental involvement studies. As noted in the FGDs with children, not engaging in vices was viewed by children as important as it will provide them a family environment conducive for learning. Similarly, FGD teacher participants also underscored the role of parents in maintaining quality of family relationships. Teachers expect that parents should make sure that the family will have healthy relationships so that it will not have spillover effects on children's learning. Maintaining quality of relationship perhaps would enable parents to concentrate more in their children instead of having to invest in making relationships in the family harmonious. This result is indicative of the need to look at the nexus of quality of family relationship and parental involvement in future research undertakings.

While parental involvement at home are directly linked to achieving better school outcomes for children at least in the context of many studies done in the West, parental involvement in third world countries like the Philippines heavily focused on making sure that their children will be able to go to school, pay for their fees, and have food on their stomachs. Because of their poor economic conditions, parents are really unable to provide adequate material resources of their children. However, as reflected in the results, it is surprising that children themselves are able to understand their situation and fully accepted the fact that their parents need to find ways to make ends meet.

It was evident that their impoverished situation is seen as either a hindrance or a motivating factor in parental involvement as well as bringing children to school. Seen as a problem with silver lining, poverty serves as a motivating factor for some of the parents to really strive hard so that they

**Table 2.** Different parental involvement strategies of Filipino parents as described by children, their parents, and their homeroom teachers.

| Children                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Parents                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Teachers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging in livelihood activities</li> <li>• Providing financial support (e.g., school allowance, internet rental)</li> <li>• Providing material resources</li> <li>• Preparing meals</li> <li>• Bringing children to school</li> <li>• Giving rewards</li> <li>• Not engaging in vices</li> <li>• Exempting child from doing household tasks</li> <li>• Motivating students to study hard</li> <li>• Explaining lessons</li> <li>• Helping in accomplishing homework</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disciplining children (e.g., controlling bed time)</li> <li>• Providing financial resources to children</li> <li>• Providing school materials</li> <li>• Preparing food</li> <li>• Helping children dress for school</li> <li>• Monitoring children's lessons</li> <li>• Monitoring children's attendance</li> <li>• Explaining lessons</li> <li>• Giving motivations</li> <li>• Attending PTA meetings</li> <li>• Attending school activities</li> <li>• Contributing to PTA school projects</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring children's performance</li> <li>• Providing support to children in accomplishing homework</li> <li>• Serving as teacher's partners</li> <li>• Teaching children life skills</li> <li>• Establishing good family relationships</li> <li>• Spending reading time with children</li> <li>• Attending school activities</li> </ul> |

are able to participate in their children's education such as in terms of providing material and financial resources. These parents would not want their children to experience hardships. Thus, they encourage their children to excel and study hard with the belief that education is one key factor to a successful life in the future.

Because of their limited education and relatively poor family life conditions, some parents still do their best despite the odds just for them to be able to help children secure a better future. However, poverty was also seen as an inhibiting factor to both parental involvement and children's participation in school. In fact, as noted in the results, some parents would even request their children to skip classes so that the latter can help finding cash for the survival of their family. Some children skip classes too because they do not have allowance or they cannot go to school with an empty stomach. While providing food and clothing is a basic parental obligation, economically challenged parents provide such resources with an expectation that their children should study hard and eventually get good jobs – a ticket to move out of poverty.

There were also salient involvement strategies among Filipino parents in the study that are not quite evident among parents in developed countries. These unique strategies perhaps develop as a way for parents in poverty to compensate for their limited engagement in children's education particularly in school. Hence, they look for other means to influence their children's learning. These strategies include maintenance of positive home environment. Parents and teacher believed that there are family issues that when not addressed will have spillover effects on children.

Children in the study mentioned that their parents are in a way contributing to their educational experiences when the latter is able to establish good family relationships and when they do not engage in vices. While providing the basic necessities of life is a matter of obligation not in the context of education, parents and children see provision of clothing and food as necessary component of overall children educational experiences. Other peculiar parental involvement strategies include exempting children from doing household tasks and by motivating children to do well in studies to move out of impoverished situation. This paper therefore suggests that parental involvement should not only be understood in the context of children's learning. This paper advances the idea that the way parents respond to family issues and concerns including economic difficulties will have impacts on children's education even if they are not directly related to children's schooling per se.

## Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated the unique ways in which Filipino parents involve in their children's education owing primarily to their economically challenged family conditions. Because of their financial limitations, parents have to devote themselves to income-generating endeavours for them to be able to provide food for the families. Despite such situation, their living condition drives them to strive hard so that their children are motivated to study. While some parents are able to capitalize on their poor condition as a motivating factor for children, some parents have to require their children to help finding means to make ends meet even at the expense of their children's education. There are peculiar parental involvement strategies noted that are not quite evident in the Western literature. These include parents exempting their children to do household tasks, parental avoidance to vices, and maintaining quality of family relationships. This study also demonstrated that our views about parental involvement is dependent on the role we play within the parental involvement social structures. For children, they view parental involvement as a means for them to access resources from parents. For teachers, they view parents as conduits or partners for learning and teaching. For parents, they view parental involvement as part and parcel of parenting. The current school practices in relation to the establishment of Parents–Teachers Associations in a way contribute to the economic burden of the family as the state legitimizes voluntary contribution of parents in school projects – this is something not evident in developed countries. This calls for the

# Parental Monitoring and Child Performance in Ghana

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## Abstract

The role of parents in the guiding and monitoring of child activities is critical towards the development of the child. In Ghana reforms taken, especially at the basic school level, have focused on improving school infrastructure and enrolment ignoring parents awareness to actively involve themselves both at home and in school activities which the researcher believe is critical toward the attainment of the much needed improvement in performance of students. The research will explore the practice of parental monitoring activities in Ghanaian homes which are needed to improve child performances at school. Specifically the study will explore the practice of parental monitoring in the Junior high school and to determine the relevant aspects of parental monitoring necessary to improve a child academic performance. A sequential explanatory mixed design strategy was adapted for the study. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire from parents of 810 selected basic school students across five regions in Ghana. Sampling of respondents in this study employed the use of multi-stage sampling techniques involving; a purposeful sampling of Five (5) Regions including: Ashanti, Greater Accra, Central, Northern, and Eastern, followed by simple random selection of 10 pupils per each grade in starting from Grade 1 to 6 in each of the selected randomly three selected schools in each Region. Data obtained during survey were entered into a SPSS statistical software subsequently analysed using both descriptive and inferential methods. Parental monitoring was measured using seven monitoring activities including: Setting Tv time for child, limiting playing time, monitoring homework, Selecting TV programme for child, Setting time for children to come back from school, setting study time for children and selecting subjects for children The Factor analysis technique was conducted on the measurement items of the parental monitoring construct. The study found that parent involvement in all monitoring activities of their children toward academic work was low. The study also establish six major aspects of parental monitoring which parents need to actively engage in for the realization of improved performance.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past five decades, Ghana has undertaken major decisions and changes in her educational system in order to improve on the standards of education. These reforms have gone along with huge financial outlays and investments into education. For example, Thompson & Casely-Hayford, (2008) stated that, US\$1 billion was spent on the Ghanaian education sector in 2006. It is on record that these reforms and investments have although have improved enrolments at the basic level have somewhat failed to translate into the much expected performances of these student. Ankomah, Y. et al, (2005) iterated that despite all these huge financial interventions, and expenditures, the quality of basic education leaves much to be desired.

It is evident from the discussions points to the fact that the most influential concern of the basic school education is yet been addressed in the Ghanaian basic institution. Several study elsewhere have suggested that impact of parental involvement in their child's education is very significant in improving child performances and hence could be critical in addressing this gap between policy and expected performance of students at the basic level of education.

Parental involvement in a child's education is known to have substantial contribution towards a number of positive outcomes of the child. Such outcomes include high expectations of children, improved academic performance, and good behaviour. Epstein (1992) posited better school attendance, lower rates of suspension, decreased use of drugs and alcohol and fewer instances of violent behaviour are the results of parental involvement in their children's education. Despite such laudable benefit amassing from parent-school collaboration, it is yet to be established through an empirical study how the various aspects of parenting or family processes influence pupil achievement in the search for quality basic education in Ghana.

One key aspect of Parental involvement is the Parents ability to monitor child activities such as their time and choice of programmes on television, regulate playing time after school, supervise child to do homework. These factors are believed to influence the child's studies after school. Cho & Han (2004) also explained that a parent monitoring activities include the following; the ability of parents to regulate the child exposure to media content especially to television and computer games, set time for child to study and complete their homework after school hours, to regulate the time children spend playing after school, ability of the parents to guide the academic progress by helping student to select subjects, and lastly the ability of parent to monitor the return of their children from school.

It is for a fact when children spend so much time on activities such as playing computer games, watching Tv and do not study at home that the negative effects of such activities outweigh the positives and to

such effect Parents are supposed to take it upon themselves to monitor the activities of children. Studies from Ghana sadly, have shown that most parents do not show interest in their children's school (Casely-Hayford, 2000; Minor, 2006; Pryor & Ampiah 2003, 2003b). These parents due to the quest to make up for their family spend most of their day outside the homes and hence have little input in the monitoring of their children.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Over the past five decades, Ghana has undertaken major decisions and changes in her educational system in order to improve on the standards of education. These reforms have gone along with huge financial outlays and investments into education. For example, Thompson & Casely-Hayford, (2008) stated that, US\$1 billion was spent on the Ghanaian education sector in 2006. It is on record that these reforms and investments have somewhat failed to address the fundamental issues which affect child education. Ankomah, Y. et al, (2005) iterated that despite all these huge financial interventions, and expenditures, the quality of basic education leaves much to be desired. The situation is not only alarming but dangerous to the economic and social development of any country including Ghana.

The seeming low quality education at the basic level calls for research into new approaches to encourage parents to show active involvement in children's education towards the realization of quality basic education for all. Many studies, educators elsewhere like Desforges, (2003), Marchant et. Al. (2001) and DeGarmoetal (1999, p.1233) have underlined the tremendous impact that parental involvement have on the academic performance of students in school and without doubt a look at reforms targeted at parent involvement will be critical to addressing the gap in education.

The seeming low quality education at the basic level calls for research into new approaches to encourage parents to show active involvement in children's education towards the realization of quality basic education for all. The current research hence seeks to ascertain the effects of family processes on pupil academic achievement in Ghana.

The questions that guide this paper therefore include; how involved are parents toward the education of their children? Which parental monitoring activities should parents pay more attention to in order to achieve improved performances of their wards at school?

## 3. Research Objective

The General Objective of the research is to contribute to the general body of knowledge and research work in the area of parental involvement. More specifically, the paper seeks to;

- Explore the practice of parental monitoring in the Junior high school.
- Determine the relevant aspects of parental monitoring necessary to a child academic performance.

## 4. Review of Relevant Literature

The family is the primary social environment that influences the behaviour of children and adolescents. Desforges, (2003) in his study stated that what happens at home has been identified as a very significant factor for promoting pupil/student achievement. Several researchers elsewhere have reiterated the relevance of parental involvement in the development of children at an early age. Such studies have equated parent involvement with several outcomes including educational achievement and cognitive development (Sylva et al, 2004). The presence of parental guidance, rules and high educational targets are relevant towards steering a child toward such positive outcomes.

In Ghana, the few studies conducted so far have mentioned the lack of interest of parents in the education of their children. In a study conducted in Ashanti Region, Pryor and Ampah (2003a; 2003b) posited that most parents were apathetic to the schooling of their children. Parents lacked interest in education and as such did not bother to get involved in the learning activities of their children. This assertion has confirmed the phenomenon observed by Baker and Stevenson (1986) and Lareau (1987) that less educated parents are not willing or able to become involved in their children's education. Nyarko (2007) further reiterates that the standard of education in Ghana has assumed a downtrend in recent times. The study reports that in Ghana, not much parental involvement is encountered at the school level as many parents do not attend Parent-Teacher meetings.

Epstein's (2002) conceptualized parental involvement to include six types of involvement, including: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community. The researcher explained parenting makes reference to parents' actions and activities that ensure children's learning and cognitive development, from good nutrition to health. Communicating covers all academically relevant information regarding children's academic development from home to school. Volunteering comprises parental attendance to school programmes and events ranging from classroom activities to school governance. Learning at home specifically involves school work, thus, helping with homework, encouraging hard-work in school and emotionally supporting the child in his/her academic challenges. Decision-making refers parents'



advocacy for their children's interest and how they influence the school environment. Community looks at how parents and community apply community resources to support children's learning. The study however failed to identify the aspects of parental monitoring and how these aspects can influence the performance of their children in school.

Kohl et al., (2000) in their study also emphasized the need for a multidimensional conceptualization of parent involvement that accounts for the distinction between parent- and school-initiated parent involvement and relies on ratings by multiple reporters (Kohl et al., 2000; Ho Sui-Chu, 1997). Kohl et al. in particular believe that making this distinction may help explain some of the contradictory research findings that have associated parent involvement with both positive and negative outcomes. Further, a 1994 study by Kohl and colleagues (as cited in Kohl et al.) pointed to the quality of the parent-child relationship as being more strongly associated with child outcomes than the amount of parent contact

In another study on parent-initiated involvement in Eccles & Harold, (1996) also emphasized the multidimensional of PI. They outlined five dimensions including: monitoring, volunteering at school, involvement in activities related to homework, contacting the school about their children's progress; and contacting the school to find out how to give extra help. According to Kohl et al. (2000), the dimensions *monitoring* and *involvement* appear to be two behaviors related to directly helping the child with homework and hence may be better conceptualized as one construct. The last two dimensions both involve contacting the school; in addition, these two were each measured by only one item and, therefore, the reliability of these dimensions cannot be determined.

Research elsewhere have shown that children after school spend much time on activities which are known to have devastating effects on their development and especially their performances in school. Susan R. Johnson, (1999) posited that children age two through eighteen spend more time watching TV than any other activity. Helsper EJ (2013); Tyrlik M, Sýkorová Z (2011) also added that the prevalence of extensive time spent on screen-based activities, such as playing games, is increasing in Slovak as well as in Czech children. Such activities tend to affect study time of children and adolescent and eventually their performances in class.

A parent monitoring activities are according to Cho & Han (2004) include the following the ability of parents to regulate the child exposure to media content especially to television and computer games, set time for child to study and complete their homework after school hours, to regulate the time children spend playing after school, ability of the parents to guide the academic progress by helping student to select subjects, and finally the ability of parent to monitor the return of their children from school.

## 5. Research Methods and Design

A sequential exploratory mixed design strategy as described by Creswell, (2005) was adapted for the study. Primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews and questionnaire from 810 parents selected across five regions in Ghana. Sampling of respondents in this study employed the use of multi-stage sampling techniques involving; a purposeful sampling of Five (5) Regions including: Ashanti, Greater Accra, Central, Northern, and Eastern, followed by simple random selection of 10 pupils per each grade in starting from Grade 1 to 6 in each of the selected randomly three selected schools in each Region. Only 800 questionnaires were returned during the survey. Data obtained during survey were entered into a SPSS 21 and data was screen for missing responses, normality and subsequently analysed using both descriptive and inferential methods. The factor analysis technique was the main inferential analysis tool employed in the study.

## 6. Findings and Discussions

The section presents the major findings and discussions garnered from primary data obtained during the study. Discussion will be presented thematically with regards to the various dimensions of parental monitoring.

Summaries presented in table 1 generally reveal that more parents did not monitor their children compared to parents who often monitored and those who do not often monitor. A critical analysis of summaries across table reveal the highest and lowest percentages of responses belonging to the variable *select subjects for child*. This was evident in estimated percentages of 56.40% in favour of "not at all" and 21.1% in favour of often.



**Table 1: Distributions of responses on various monitoring activities toward child education**

|                                             |         | not at all | not often | Often  |
|---------------------------------------------|---------|------------|-----------|--------|
| Set Tv time for child                       | Count   | 325        | 277       | 264    |
|                                             | Row N % | 37.50%     | 32.00%    | 30.50% |
| Limit playing time                          | Count   | 361        | 231       | 260    |
|                                             | Row N % | 42.40%     | 27.10%    | 30.50% |
| Monitors homework                           | Count   | 290        | 270       | 299    |
|                                             | Row N % | 33.80%     | 31.40%    | 34.80% |
| Select TV programme for child               | Count   | 308        | 192       | 362    |
|                                             | Row N % | 35.70%     | 22.30%    | 42.00% |
| Set time for children to return from school | Count   | 296        | 213       | 355    |
|                                             | Row N % | 34.26 %    | 24.65%    | 41.09% |
| Set study time for children                 | Count   | 344        | 214       | 298    |
|                                             | Row N % | 40.20%     | 25.00%    | 34.80% |
| Select subjects for children                | Count   | 483        | 193       | 181    |
|                                             | Row N % | 56.40%     | 22.5%     | 21.1%  |
| TOTAL                                       |         | 40.01      | 26.43     | 33.56  |

**Source: Survey**

The finding generally suggest that most parents are not involved in the selection of subjects for their children. Results from analysis of responses to a follow up question on why parents did not give attention to the selection of subjects show that parent believed courses selected by the school for their children were good enough for them.

In analysis of the distribution of individual aspects of parenting reveals that more parents did not monitor the following: *Limit playing time* (42.40%), *Set study time for children* (40.20%), *Set Tv time for child* (37.50%). The more disturbing situation is the fact that among those who did monitor children more than 40% did not monitor these variables often. Further analysis of open ended responses to understand the observed distributions revealed a common underlying reason; that these parent were usually not back from work when children return from school (Appendix)

Some responses from some participants on programs and limit tv for kids are as follows;

*Mother Accra:*

*"This is a big problem because most times I am not at home. But I make sure if there is any programme on the television that is above his age I switch it off or he goes to his room to read when I am around".*

*Mother Kumasi :*

*"This is a major problem for me. The child like watching TV too much and I have contemplated taking the TV from the hall but I am afraid she would go and watch elsewhere and that might bring trouble".*

Similarly a father in Kumasi remarked

*"I don't have much to say there because I am not usually here because of my work. But when I am around I keep an eye on them, by 9pm they should all be asleep, but there could be a lapse when I am not around".*

Some reasons given by parents on why they did not set study times are outlined below:

In the words of one mother in Tamale,

*"No, I don't set specific times because I am not around to supervise him. However when I am around I make sure he study".*

Another mother responded.

*"I am not aware, so I do not set time for studies after school".*

A father in Kumasi remarked,

*"No I have never decided what time he should learn. He decided when he wants to study".*

Another mother in Accra commented,

*"No, I don't do that for her because she's good at schoolwork".*

The responses suggest that apart from the fact that parents spent much time at work illiteracy and negligence on the path of parents also contribute toward low levels of involvement in children's education.

These findings are supported by Haas, (1992), Milkie & Peltola, (1999) who stated that workplace barriers such as longer work hours are ranked by fathers as the most important reason for low levels of paternal involvement. Not only do children of these parent suffer academically but these children are also more likely to have social and emotional difficulties (Strazdins, Clements, Korda, Broom, & D'Souza, 2006).

Analysis of distribution reveals however that parent seem to pay more attention to *Select TV programme for child*, *Set time for children to come back from school* and *Monitors homework*. This was evident in estimated percentages of 42.0%, 41.1% and 34.8% respectively for the response "often". A follow up question was asked from parent who monitored child homework to find out involved how parent are in their children

homework and studies. Responses suggest that these parent do not only encourage their wards to study but are actively monitor the progress of their child's performance (appendix).

One mother in Accra recount her experiences:

*Whenever he comes back from school I make sure I look through his books to know the assignments he has been given, the grades he gets and how he answers his questions. This gives me an idea as to how well he is doing well in school.*

The next research objective of the current study involves identifying the relevant are aspects of parental monitoring needed for an improved child performance in school. Participants rated their agreement on how the seven parent monitoring items contribute to child academic performance. A factor analysis approach is adapted to test further the relevance of measured items of the model by testing the formulated hypothesis: Ha1: all measurement items of the study are relevant manifest variables of parental discussion in Ghana.

An explorative test toward the factor Analysis was conducted using correlation analysis. The correlation matrix with the probability values estimated using SPSS 21 are presented in appendix. It is observed from the output of correlation analysis that significant relationships exist among rating of all measurement items (manifest variables) used in measuring the Parental Monitoring Construct. Also the Matrix reveals that there are no evidence of multi-co-linearity between two variables. These result imply a substantial amount of relationship exist among variable hence suggest that they could be explaining a common underlying construct.

**Table 3:KMO and Bartlett's Test of sampling adequacy**

|                                                  |                    |         |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. |                    | .880    |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                    | Approx. Chi-Square | 2.759E3 |
|                                                  | Df                 | 21      |
|                                                  | Sig.               | .000    |

**Source: Author**

Table 3 shows the KMO test of sampling adequacy associated with the Monitoring construct. This test is used to verify the validity of the Factor Analysis (FA) used to screen for measured items of the construct. As a rule of thumb, the FA is valid when the associated value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is above .70 (Friel C. M., 2016). The estimated statistic of 0.880 indicate that the degree of common variance among the eleven variables is "Meritorious" and that when a factor analysis is conducted, the factors extracted will account for substantial amount of variance.

The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is also conducted to test if the non-zero correlations estimated in the sample matrix are due to sampling error. The test is conducted to test the formulated null hypothesis; Ho: The intercorrelation matrix comes from a population in which the variables are noncollinear. Result from analysis reveal that the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at 5% significance level (Chi-Square =275.9, p = .000). We therefore have sufficient evident to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the sample intercorrelation matrix did not come from a population in which the intercorrelation matrix is an identity matrix. The result from the KMO test and the Bartlett test therefore suggest that the FA being used is valid and factorable.

Subsequently factor analysis was conducted on the construct to confirm measurement validity. The Results of the Initial Solution of extracted eigenvalues using principal component analysis are presented in table 4.

**Table 4:Total Variance Explained**

| Component | Initial Eigenvalues |               |              | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings |               |              |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
|           | Total               | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total                               | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1         | 3.900               | 55.719        | 55.719       | 3.900                               | 55.719        | 55.719       |
| 2         | .929                | 13.272        | 68.991       |                                     |               |              |
| 3         | .641                | 9.155         | 78.146       |                                     |               |              |
| 4         | .530                | 7.571         | 85.718       |                                     |               |              |
| 5         | .404                | 5.768         | 91.485       |                                     |               |              |
| 6         | .349                | 4.986         | 96.471       |                                     |               |              |
| 7         | .247                | 3.529         | 100.000      |                                     |               |              |

**Source: Author**

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

From table 4 it can be observed that the 1st factor has an eigenvalue = 3.0. A result which imply that the single factor explains about 3.9 more variance than a single variable. This result also represents 55.719% (3.9\*100/7

units of variance) of variance explained by the single factor. Factors 2 through 7 however have eigenvalues less than 1, and hence explain less variance than a single variable. The result is reflective of the KMO of 0.886, an admirable percentage of variance and further confirms that, one factor is adequate to explain the variation in the data used.

The table of communalities are also presented in table 5. The values in the Extraction column indicate that the proportion of each variable's variance can be explained by the principal components. Variables with high values are well represented in the common factor space, while variables with low values are not well represented. Higher communalities are desirable and rule communalities should exceed 0.50. If the communality for a variable is less than 50%, it is a candidate for exclusion from the analysis because the factor solution contains less than half of the variance in the original variable, and the explanatory power of that variable might be better represented by the individual variable (Hair et al., 2006).

**Table 5: Communalities of items for Parental Monitoring Construct**

|                                                | Initial | Extraction |
|------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|
| Set Tv time for child                          | 1.000   | .733       |
| Limit playing time                             | 1.000   | .629       |
| Monitors homework                              | 1.000   | .526       |
| Select TV programme for child                  | 1.000   | .650       |
| Set time for children to come back from school | 1.000   | .538       |
| Set study time for children                    | 1.000   | .713       |
| Select subjects for children                   | 1.000   | .110       |

**Source: Author**

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

From table 5 the extracted communality of 0.733 implies that 73.3% of the variance in the original 'set TV time' variable is explained by the underlying factor cost. Similarly all remaining manifest variables, with the exception of 'select subjects' recorded high communalities hence suggesting that all items can be explained by the underlying construct are identified as relevant cost items. The variable 'select subjects for children' did not meet the criteria hence is deleted and analysis redone.

Subsequently factor analysis was conducted on the construct to confirm measurement validity. The total variation explained by the principal/underlying factor is presented in table 6.

**Table 6: Total Variance Explained by measurement items**

| Component | Initial Eigenvalues |               |              | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings |               |              |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
|           | Total               | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total                               | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1         | 3.816               | 63.600        | 63.600       | 3.816                               | 63.600        | 63.600       |
| 2         | .651                | 10.845        | 74.445       |                                     |               |              |
| 3         | .530                | 8.834         | 83.279       |                                     |               |              |
| 4         | .405                | 6.753         | 90.032       |                                     |               |              |
| 5         | .351                | 5.846         | 95.877       |                                     |               |              |
| 6         | .247                | 4.123         | 100.000      |                                     |               |              |

**Source: Author**

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The table of communalities from analysis with one item deleted is presented in table 7. Results also show improved values of the extracted variance for all remaining items suggesting more proportions of each variable's variance can be explained by the principal component.

**Table 7: Communalities of items for Parental Monitoring Construct**

|                                                | Initial | Extraction |
|------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|
| Set Tv time for child                          | 1.000   | .738       |
| Limit playing time                             | 1.000   | .641       |
| Monitors homework                              | 1.000   | .526       |
| Select TV programme for child                  | 1.000   | .657       |
| Set time for children to come back from school | 1.000   | .543       |
| Set study time for children                    | 1.000   | .710       |

**Source: Author**

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The results above hence reveals that there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that measured items of parental monitoring were not relevant manifest variables of the of the Monitoring construct. We therefore, accept the alternative hypothesis.

A summary of results the component matrix of the factor analysis is presented in the model presented in figure 1.

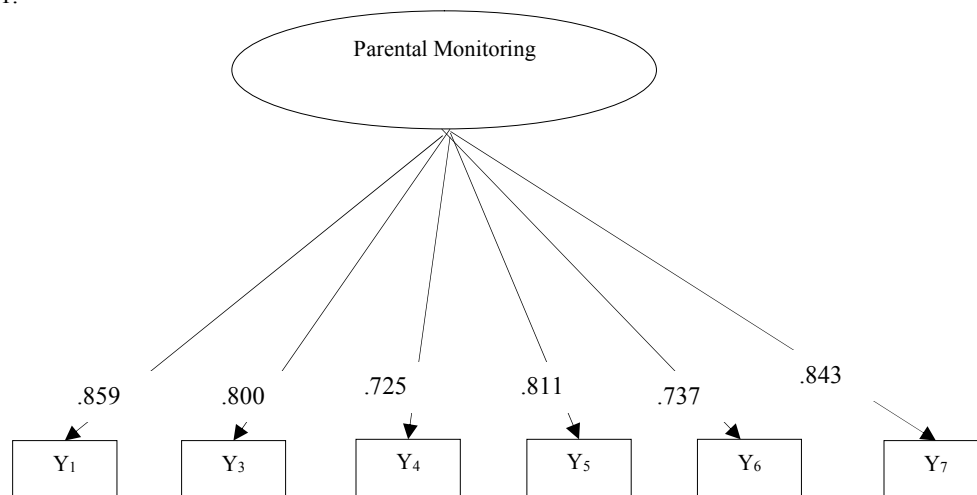


**Figure 1: Parental monitoring model showing six relevant measure items**

The model shows high factor loadings of each measurement item of the construct, Parental Monitoring. The high loadings are indicative of that fact that a substantial amount of variability in each items and could be explained by the underlying factor Parental Monitoring. The six measured items including: *Parent set Tv time for child, limit playing time, monitors homework, select TV programme for child, Set time for children to come back from school, set study time for children* are therefore critical toward defining parental monitor which yields improved education of children at the basic school level.

Parental monitoring effects on the educational pursuit and attainment of an individual is by a study conducted by Alika & Egbochuku (2009) who found that parental guidance exerts effects on the learning achievement of an adolescent. These aspects of monitoring when given keen attention would bring about considerable changes in the performance of children in school.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the finding for the present study the following recommendations are suggested:

- Parents need to understand the relevance of their monitoring activities on the development of their child and make extra effort to get involved in the studies of their children.
- Parents also need to ensure rules focused at ensuing their children make maximum use of the time after school
- The parent should develop a time table for the child so as to regulate child activities such as learning, playing, and sleeping.
- Parents could also employ the service of teachers for extra classes, either at home or at school, so as to engage the children effectively after school hours.
- Schools should collaborate with Parents to incooperate into the PTA meetings subjects regarding

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Students' perceptions on distance education: A multinational study



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## Abstract

Many universities offer Distance Education (DE) courses and programs to address the diverse educational needs of students and to stay current with advancing technology. Some Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) that do not offer DE find it difficult to navigate through the steps that are needed to provide such courses and programs. Investigating learners' perceptions, attitudes and willingness to try DE can provide guidance and recommendations for IHEs that are considering expanding use of DE formats. A survey was distributed to undergraduate students in Portugal, UAE and Ukraine. The results of this pilot study showed that in all three countries, students' major concerns about such programs were time management, motivation, and English language skills. Although students were somewhat apprehensive many indicated they were interested in taking DE courses. Six recommendations informed by interpretation of students' responses and the literature, are offered to assist institutions who want to offer DE as part of their educational strategy.

**Keywords:** Distance education, Multinational study, Perceptions of distance education, Undergraduate students

## Introduction

The World Wide Web has made information access and distribution of educational content available to a large fraction of the world's population and helped to move Distance Education (DE) to the digital era. DE has become increasingly common in many universities worldwide (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Nonetheless, there are still many universities that do not provide this opportunity because it is not part of their institutional culture. As DE becomes more prevalent, countries and Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) that do not provide DE courses will need to look at this option to retain and expand their student population. (Keegan, 1994; Nakamura, 2017).

In order to develop such programs, it is useful to determine if students are receptive to taking such online courses and are prepared to do so. This study addresses students' perceptions and their interest in DE. In addition, it provides a comparative analysis across three countries whose IHEs do not have extensive offerings in DE. The results of this research provide some strategies to encourage and support students to take DE courses.

## Literature review

A seminal article by Keegan (1980) presents key aspects of DE. Some of the elements are: physical separation of teacher and learner, learning occurs in the context of an educational institution, technical media are used, teacher and learner communicate, face to face meetings are possible, and an industrial model of providing education is used. More recently varying definitions of DE seem to be based on the perspective of various educators and to reflect the educational culture of each country and IHE. However, some common descriptors seem to be accepted by most stakeholders in the field. Distance education is an educational experience where instructors and learners are separated in time and space (Keegan, 2002) which means it can happen away from an academic institution and can lead to a degree or credential (Gunawardena, McIsaac, & Jonassen, 2008).

Although there are different types of DE, this research focuses on online learning. The following types of online learning will be investigated: synchronous, asynchronous, blended, massive online open courses (MOOC), and open schedule online courses. In synchronous instruction, teachers and learners meet (usually online) for a session at a predetermined time. According to Watts (2016) live streaming video and/or audio are used for synchronous interaction. Although videoconferencing allows participants to see each other this is not considered a face-to-face interaction because of the physical separation (Keegan, 1980).

Asynchronous instruction means that teachers and learners do not have synchronous sessions and that students have access to course content through the Internet at any time they want or need. Communication among the participants occurs mainly through email and online forums and is typically moderated by the instructor (Watts, 2016). According to Garrison (2000) "Asynchronous collaborative learning may well be the defining technology of the postindustrial era of distance education." (p.12) Yet another type of DE is blended learning (BL). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) define BL as combining face-to-face classroom time with online learning experiences. Although it is not clear as to how much time is allocated to online in the blended model "the real test of blended learning is the effective integration of the two main components (face-to-face and Internet technology) such that we are not just adding on to the existing dominant approach or method." (p.97) In the BL format different teaching strategies and instructional technology can be used to help individuals who have different learning styles, needs and interests (Tseng & Walsh Jr., 2016).

Another type of DE is MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses). This format was first introduced in 2006 and offers distributed open online courses that are available without cost to a very large number of participants (Cormier, McAuley, Siemens, & Stewart, 2010). MOOCs origins can be traced to the Open Access Initiative in 2002 which advocates sharing knowledge freely through the Internet. By providing educational opportunities MOOCs can address the increasing demand for training and education (Zawacki-Richter & Naidu, 2016). Finally, in open schedule online courses students work asynchronously with all the materials being provided digitally. Although there are deadlines for submitting assignments, students working at their own pace have some independence as to when they do their coursework (Campus Explorer, 2019).

There are advantages and disadvantages in taking DE courses. Some of the advantages are self-paced study, time and space flexibility, time saving (no commute between



home and school) and the fact that a distance learning course often costs less. Disadvantages include a sense of isolation, the struggle with staying motivated, lack of face-to-face interaction, difficulty in getting immediate feedback, the need for constant and reliable access to technology, and occasionally some difficulty with accreditation (De Paepe, Zhu, & Depryck, 2018; Lei & Gupta, 2010; Venter, 2003; Zuhairi, Wahyono, & Suratinah, 2006).

Most of the literature concerning student perception of DE courses, both blended and entirely online, involves students who have enrolled in online courses. Some articles address comparisons of perceptions between face-to-face and online students regarding DE (Daniels & Feather, 2002; Dobbs, del Carmen, & Waid-Lindberg, 2017; Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Lanier, 2006). Additional studies address adult and undergraduate students and cover many aspects of the online experience (Dobbs et al., 2017; Horspool & Lange, 2012; Seok, DaCosta, Kinsell, & Tung, 2010b, a). However, little, if any research has been conducted that only addresses perceptions of students who live in countries in which few IHEs offer online courses.

In a study comparing online and face-to-face learning, Horspool and Lange (2012) found that students chose to take online courses to avoid travel time to class and scheduling problems. A majority of both face-to-face and online students did not experience technological issues. Both groups also found that communication with the instructor was adequate. Online students indicated that instructor response time to questions was prompt. By contrast online students perceived peer communication as occurring much less often. Course satisfaction was comparable for both formats (Horspool & Lange, 2012). Responses to another survey concerning online and traditional course formats found that students' reasons for taking online courses included flexibility to accommodate work and family schedules, the ability to avoid commuting to the university and more online courses being available to them (Dobbs et al., 2017). Both online and traditional students agreed that traditional courses were easier, and they learned more in that format. They also concurred that online courses required more effort. Experienced online students indicated that the quality of their courses was good while traditional students who had never taken an online course felt that the quality of online courses was lower.

There is additional research that focuses on students including those enrolled in community colleges, MOOCs, blended learning as well as adult learners. Community college students' and instructors' perceptions of effectiveness of online courses were compared by Seok et al. (2010b, a). The researchers focused on pedagogical characteristics (management, Universal Design for Learning, interaction, teaching design and content) and technical features (interface, navigation and support). In addition, responses were examined based on various aspects of the subjects' demographics. Two surveys with 99 items were distributed electronically. One survey was for instructors and the other for students. In general, instructors and students indicated that teaching and learning online was effective. Female students responded more positively to most questions concerning effectiveness, and instructors also found it more positive (Seok et al., 2010b, a).

Students who enrolled in a MOOC were motivated to take other courses in this format based on their perception that it was useful for achieving their goals. In addition, their motivation was high if the course was posted on a platform that was easy to use

(Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2016). This study also found that as students proceeded through the course, they gained confidence.

Blended learning was examined by Kurt and Yildirim (2018) to determine student satisfaction and what they considered to be important features of the blended format. The results indicated that the Turkish students who participated, almost unanimously felt that BL was beneficial and that their own role and the instructors' role was central to their satisfaction. The authors stated, "the prominent components in the process have been identified as face-to-face lessons, the features of online course materials, LMS used, design-specific activities, process-based measurement and evaluation, student-student interaction and out-of-class sharing respectively." (p. 439) DE has a growth potential and offers the opportunity to reach many people (Fidalgo, 2012), hence it can be used as a technique for mass education (Perraton, 2008). According to Perraton (2008) DE can be adapted to the needs of current and previous generations who did not complete their education. DE can also reach individuals who live in remote locations and do not have the means to attend school.

## **Methodology**

### **Study goals**

The goal of this pilot study is to examine what undergraduate students' perceptions are concerning DE and their willingness to enroll in this type of course. This study focuses on three countries that do not offer extensive DE accredited programs. By comparing three countries with similar DE profiles, commonalities and differences that are relevant and useful can be found. When the IHEs from these countries decide or have the conditions to move towards DE, the results of this study may help them adapt this format to their particular context and students' needs. Results may also help IHEs plan their strategy for offering online courses to current and future students and attract prospective students who otherwise would not be able to enroll in the face-to-face courses that are available.

### **Research questions**

1. Have undergraduate students taken an online course previously?
2. What are undergraduate students' perceptions of distance education?
3. What are the reasons for undergraduate students to enroll/not enroll in distance education courses?
4. What preparation do undergraduate students feel they need to have before taking distance education courses?
5. What is the undergraduate students' receptivity towards enrolling in distance education courses?
6. What types of distance education would undergraduate students be interested in taking?

### **Setting**

This research was conducted at IHEs in three countries (Portugal, Ukraine and UAE). A description of each country's sociodemographic and technological use provides a context for this study.

Portugal, a country located at the western end of the European continent, has a resident population of just over 10 million people (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2019). Data collected by Instituto Nacional de Estatística in 2019 indicated that almost 81% of households in Portugal had Internet access at home. According to the Portuguese National Statistical Institute (2019), the rate of Internet use by the adult population is about 76%. Among this population, people who attend or have completed secondary and higher education have a higher percentage of Internet use (98%) (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2019).

The most used devices to access the Internet are smartphones and laptops. Regarding computer tasks, the most frequent ones are copying and moving files and folders and transferring files from the computer to other devices (PORDATA - Base de Dados Portugal Contemporâneo, 2017).

Among Internet users, 80% use social networks, which is a higher percentage than the European Union (EU) average. Mobile Internet access (outside the home and workplace and on portable devices) is 84% and maintains a strong growth trend (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2019).

Ukraine is one of the post-soviet countries located in Eastern Europe and it strives to be integrated in economic and political structures of the EU. The current population of the country is 42 million. Despite the low incomes of many Ukrainians, modern technological devices are widespread among the population. The State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2019) reported that there were 26 million Internet subscribers in the country in the beginning of 2019. However, Ukrainians do not have a high level of digital literacy yet. According to the Digital Transformation Ministry of Ukraine (Communications Department of the Secretariat of the CMU, 2019), almost 38% of Ukrainian people aged from 18 to 70 have poor skills in computer literacy and 15.1% of the citizens have no computer skills.

According to the survey conducted by the Digital Transformation Ministry of Ukraine (The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2019) 27.5% Ukrainian families have a tablet, and 30.6% have one smart phone, 26.4% have two smart phones, 16.5% have three smart phones and 10.8% have four and more smart phones. As for laptops, 42.7% Ukrainian families have a laptop and 45.6% have a desktop computer (The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2019). The data from the ministry did not indicate if families have multiple devices, however the data shows that technological devices are widespread.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a country located in the Persian Gulf that borders with Oman and Saudi Arabia. The UAE has a population of 9.77 million and is one of the richest countries in the world based on gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. The resident population consists of 11,5% Emiratis and the remaining residents are expats from countries such as India, Pakistan, Philippines, Egypt and others (Global Media Insight, 2020).

Regarding technology use, 91% of the residents use mobile Internet and over 98% of the households have Internet access (Knoema, 2018). Mobile devices such as smartphones are used to access the Internet mainly at home or at work (Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, 2017).

In 2017 the most frequent Internet activities were: sending/receiving emails (61%), posting information or instant messaging (55%), getting information about goods or services (45%), reading or downloading online newspapers, magazines or electronic

books (41%) and telephoning over the Internet/VOIP (33%). Downloading movies, images, music, watching TV or video, or listening to radio or music is also a frequent activity performed by 27% of the Internet users followed by Internet banking (25%) and purchasing or ordering good and services (22%) (Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, 2017).

While these three countries were selected due to the location of the researchers and thus provided convenience samples, the three countries have a similar lack of DE offerings. Online surveys were emailed to students enrolled in a variety of undergraduate face-to-face courses during the fall semester of 2018. The students in Portugal and the UAE were enrolled in a teacher education program and the survey was emailed to two course sections in Portugal (73 students) and four course sections in the UAE (108 students). At the IHE in Ukraine, students were majoring in applied mathematics, philology, diagnostics, social work and philosophy, and surveys were emailed to 102 students who were enrolled in five course sections. In Portugal and Ukraine, the URL for the online survey was emailed by the instructor of all the course sections. In the UAE the instructor who emailed the URL for the survey taught two of the course sections. The students in the other two sections knew this instructor from taking courses with her previously. The students participating in this study were a convenience sample based on the disciplines taught by the researchers.

#### **Data collection**

An online survey with 10 closed questions about undergraduate students' perception and receptivity towards enrolling in DE courses was developed by the researchers. Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker (2010) compared traditional methods (i.e. face-to-face, paper and pencil) with web-based surveys and found the latter to be more effective for gathering data from many participants. The questions designed by the researchers were informed by their experience/practice as well as in-depth literature review. The survey was created to respond to the research questions that guided this study. Response choices to the multiple-choice questions were based on issues and concerns related to DE. Students' responses were collected towards the end of the first semester of the 2018/19 academic year.

The survey was developed to address research questions that assess undergraduate students' perceptions of DE and students' receptivity towards enrolling in DE courses (c.f. Appendix). The use of surveys allows researchers to "obtain information about thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, personality and behavioral intentions of research participants." (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 192) The survey questions included multiple response formats: Likert scale, select more than one response and multiple choice. Surveys for Portugal were presented in Portuguese. In Ukraine the surveys were translated into Ukrainian. Since English is the language of instruction at the UAE institution, their survey was in English. The URL for the survey was emailed to students by their instructors and was available in an online Google Form. The survey took approximately 10 min to complete. The study consisted of a "self-selected" convenience sample.

#### **Data analysis**

Survey results were recorded in Google Forms and an Excel spreadsheet was used to collect students' responses. Descriptive statistics of the responses to the survey are

presented in graphs and tables with percentages of responses displayed. The descriptive statistics provide summaries about the sample's answers to each of the questions as well as measures of variability (or spread) and central tendency.

### Research approval and data management

The research proposal was submitted to the Research and Grants Committee and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the college in the UAE. No personal information (name, College ID number or any other type of information that allows the identification of students) was asked from the students in the surveys. The surveys were anonymous. Only the Principal Investigator (PI) had access to all the data collected. The data will be stored in the PI's password protected computer for 5 years.

### Results

Fifty five of the 73 Portuguese students who received the survey responded and 98 of the 108 UAE students responded. In the Ukraine 102 students were sent surveys and 70 responded. Below are participants' responses to questions concerning age, gender, as well as level of confidence using the computer and the Internet.

Students' age range was from 17 to 50 years old. Most students' age ranges were between 17 and 29 years. Survey responses indicated that 7% of the students in the UAE were male and 93% female, in the Ukraine 43% were male and 57% female and in Portugal 9% male, and 91% female.

Participants were asked about their level of confidence using a computer and the Internet. Results are presented in Table 1.

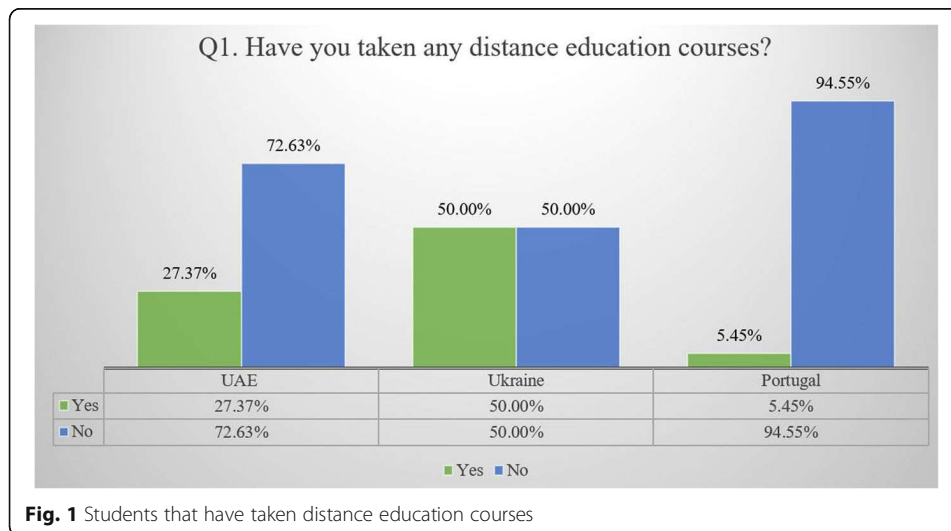
The use of participants from three countries allows the study of trends and to determine differences and/or similarities of perceptions about DE. Although the students were enrolled in courses in diverse content areas, they were all undergraduates, almost all under 30 years old, and most were confident using the computer and Internet. These demographic similarities provided a relatively cohesive group for this study while allowing a comparison across countries.

A range of questions were asked about students' attitudes towards and experience with DE. To determine the participants' experience with DE two questions were asked.

The data indicates that out of 223 students who responded to the survey, a total of 63 students have taken DE courses. Half of the Ukraine students, about one quarter of the UAE students and only 5% of students in the group from Portugal had taken DE courses (Fig. 1). As shown in Fig. 2, of the students who have had previous experience in DE, most Ukraine students have taken one or two online courses, most UAE students have taken one course and a few Portuguese students have taken one course.

**Table 1** Student confidence level using a computer and the Internet

| Country  | Not at all confident | Somewhat confident | Neutral/ Cannot judge | Confident | Extremely confident |
|----------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------|---------------------|
|          | Percent              | Percent            | Percent               | Percent   | Percent             |
| Portugal | 0.00                 | 7.27               | 20.00                 | 54.55     | 18.18               |
| Ukraine  | 0.00                 | 2.86               | 5.71                  | 32.86     | 58.57               |
| UAE      | 3.16                 | 7.37               | 26.32                 | 25.26     | 37.89               |



More than half of Portuguese students, about two thirds of the Ukraine students and a little over one third of UAE students had a Very favorable or Favorable attitude towards DE. Approximately one third of Portuguese and Ukraine students were Neutral/Unable to judge their attitude. A little less than half of UAE students also indicated this. A small percentage of Portuguese, and one fifth of UAE students indicated their attitude was Very unfavorable or Unfavorable and no Ukraine students reported this (Table 2).

More than one third of Portuguese students shared that managing class and study time, saving time by choosing study location and working at their own pace were reasons to enroll in DE. About two thirds of the students from Ukraine reported that working at their own pace and managing their study time were reasons to enroll. A little more than half of these students reported that reasons for enrolling in DE included managing class time, saving time by selecting study location and not having to travel to school as well as having more options for courses or colleges to attend. Almost half of the UAE students had similar reasons for enrolling in a DE courses including managing class and study time, saving time by choosing study location and working at their own

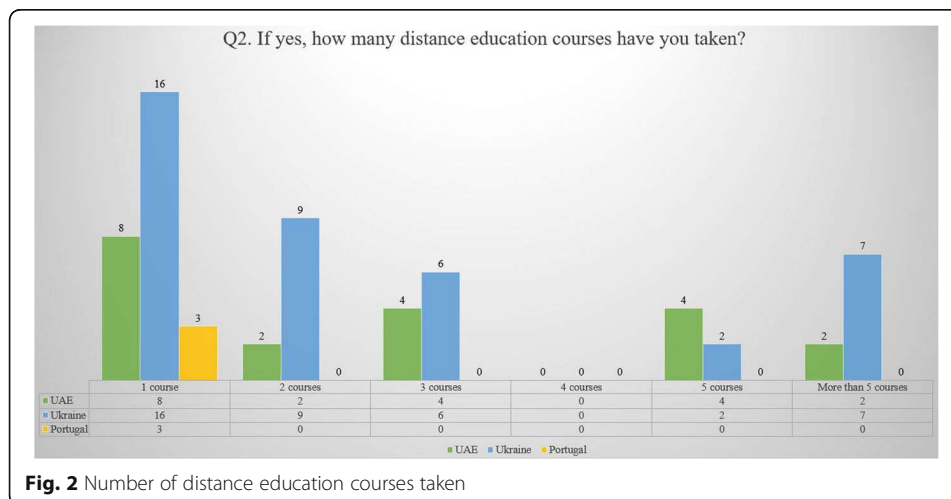




**Table 2** Attitudes toward distance education

| Country  | Very unfavorable<br>Percent | Unfavorable<br>Percent | Neutral/ Unable to judge<br>Percent | Favorable<br>Percent | Very favorable<br>Percent |
|----------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Portugal | 0.00                        | 7.27                   | 34.55                               | 52.73                | 5.45                      |
| Ukraine  | 0.00                        | 0.00                   | 31.43                               | 42.86                | 25.71                     |
| UAE      | 8.42                        | 12.63                  | 42.11                               | 21.05                | 15.79                     |

pace. In addition, a little more than half of the UAE students also shared that having more options for courses or colleges to attend were reasons to enroll. The reasons that were selected the least by all three groups were that courses were less expensive and enrolling in a preferred program (Tables 3 and 4).

Students were given eleven options as to why they would not enroll in DE courses, which are displayed in Tables 5 and 6. Two reasons that were chosen most often were difficulty staying motivated and preferring face-to-face classes. A small number of Ukraine students reported this as a reason to not enroll in DE courses. Difficulty getting immediate feedback was also a concern for UAE students. Close to one third in the three groups indicated that difficulty contacting the instructor and interacting with peers as well as missing campus life are reasons for not enrolling. About one tenth of Portuguese, one fifth of Ukraine and one fifth of the UAE students reported difficulty getting accreditation as a reason for not enrolling. Not knowing enough about DE was indicated by one tenth of Portuguese, one fifth of Ukraine and one fifth of the UAE students. Only a small number of all the students indicated three categories that are frequently cited in the literature as preventing students from enrolling, these include access to technology, feeling of isolation and too great an expense.

Tables 7 and 8 show student responses to a question regarding the preparation they think they would need before enrolling in a DE course. A little over one tenth of the Portuguese students indicated that they needed better computer equipment, writing skills and a dedicated study space. About one quarter of these students reported they need better skills in the following areas: time management, computer and English language skills, as well as needing to have learning goals and objectives. Having a better Internet connection and the need to develop a study plan was shared by approximately one third of these students. Finally, the highest rated prerequisite for these Portuguese students was to be more motivated.

Few of the Ukraine students felt that they needed better computer equipment or skills, a dedicated study space or a better Internet connection at home. Their concerns focused on their behaviors as students since half or a little more than half felt they needed to be more motivated, have learning objectives and goals, a study plan and

**Table 3** Reasons to enroll in distance education courses (More than one could be chosen)

| Country  | Other<br>Percent | It is less<br>expensive<br>Percent | I can enroll in the programs that<br>I really want<br>Percent | I have more options<br>when selecting courses<br>and/or a college<br>Percent | I don't have to<br>travel to school<br>Percent |
|----------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Portugal | 1.82             | 5.45                               | 9.09                                                          | 12.73                                                                        | 20.00                                          |
| Ukraine  | 0.00             | 20.00                              | 32.86                                                         | 51.43                                                                        | 51.43                                          |
| UAE      | 2.11             | 21.05                              | 27.37                                                         | 29.47                                                                        | 45.26                                          |

**Table 4** Reasons to enroll in distance education courses (More than one could be chosen)

| Country  | I can work at my own pace | I can manage my own study time | I can save time by studying from a location I choose | I can manage my own class time |
|----------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|          | Percent                   | Percent                        | Percent                                              | Percent                        |
| Portugal | 36.36                     | 38.18                          | 40.00                                                | 45.45                          |
| Ukraine  | 67.14                     | 64.29                          | 54.29                                                | 55.71                          |
| UAE      | 47.37                     | 48.42                          | 48.42                                                | 54.74                          |

better management skills. About one third of these students also reported that they needed better English language skills.

The UAE students were less confident than the Ukraine students about computer skills and needing better equipment and a better Internet connection at home. Almost half of these UAE students reported their need for a study plan and motivation as their most pressing needs. Better management and English language skills were recorded by about one third of the students. One quarter of the UAE students felt they needed better writing skills and a dedicated study space.

Table 9 shows students' interest in enrolling in DE courses. Almost one quarter of the Ukraine students are Extremely interested in taking DE courses and almost half are Somewhat interested. This contrasts with the students from Portugal who indicated that only 5% are Extremely interested and almost a quarter Somewhat interested. The UAE students' interest in enrolling fell in between the students from the two other countries. One fifth to almost one third of all three groups were Neutral/Unable to judge. About one tenth of students from Ukraine reported Not being very interested or Not at all interested which contrasts with the Portuguese and UAE students whose numbers were about one half and one quarter respectively.

Tables 10 and 11 show the types of DE that the students were interested in trying. Portuguese students favored Open schedule courses, followed by Blended learning and Synchronous. Few of these students were interested in MOOCs and Asynchronous. More than half of the students from Ukraine were interested in MOOCs and Blended learning followed by Open schedule. About one third of these students were interested in Synchronous and Asynchronous. UAE students most popular formats were Open schedule and Blended learning followed by Synchronous and Asynchronous. There was little interest in MOOCs by the UAE students. Few Portuguese and Ukraine students indicated that they would not take a DE course, however, almost a quarter of the UAE students indicated this.

**Table 5** Reasons to not enroll in distance education courses (More than one could be chosen)

| Country  | It is too expensive | I do not have constant, reliable access to technology | I would feel very isolated | I would have difficulty getting accreditation for the course | I do not know enough about distance education courses | I would miss campus life |
|----------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
|          | Percent             | Percent                                               | Percent                    | Percent                                                      | Percent                                               | Percent                  |
| Portugal | 1.82                | 7.27                                                  | 10.91                      | 10.91                                                        | 12.73                                                 | 25.45                    |
| Ukraine  | 0.00                | 2.86                                                  | 8.57                       | 27.14                                                        | 21.43                                                 | 28.57                    |
| UAE      | 1.05                | 15.79                                                 | 17.89                      | 21.05                                                        | 28.42                                                 | 31.58                    |

**Table 6** Reasons to not enroll in distance education courses (More than one could be chosen)

| Country  | I would have difficulty contacting the instructors | I would have difficulty interacting with peers | It would be difficult for me to stay motivated | I would have difficulty getting immediate feedback | I prefer face to face to face classes |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|          | Percent                                            | Percent                                        | Percent                                        | Percent                                            | Percent                               |
| Portugal | 27.27                                              | 30.91                                          | 30.91                                          | 32.73                                              | 52.73                                 |
| Ukraine  | 28.57                                              | 21.43                                          | 65.71                                          | 24.29                                              | 14.29                                 |
| UAE      | 32.63                                              | 36.84                                          | 41.05                                          | 47.37                                              | 55.79                                 |

## Discussion

Data indicates close to a 100% of the UAE residents use the Internet at home or on their mobile devices (Knoema, 2018). By contrast a smaller percentage of individuals use the Internet in Portugal and the Ukraine (Infographics, 2019). Internet use in each country does not seem to greatly impact UAE students' opinions regarding DE.

Students' perceptions of DE vary across the participants from the three countries. Portuguese and Ukrainian students rated DE more favorably than UAE students. Half of the Ukrainian students have experience with DE which might account for their favorable attitude. In contrast, in Portugal only a very small percentage of the students had experience. However, this does not seem to have negatively influenced their attitude towards DE. The interest level and engagement with new technologies by Portuguese students may help explain the favorable perception the participants had toward DE. A study by Costa, Faria, and Neto (2018) found that 90% of Portuguese students use new technologies and 69% of them use new technologies more than an hour and a half a day. Based on three European studies, *Diário de Notícias* (2011) stated that Portuguese students "appear at the forefront of those who best master information and communication technologies (ICT)." (para.1) Another factor influencing respondents might be that currently, and for the first time, the Portuguese government has passed a law that will regulate DE in the country. This new law will open the possibility for other IHEs to provide DE courses that lead to a degree.

Ukrainian students reported a high level of confidence in operating technological devices. The reason for this may be, in part, because of state educational requirements. Since the end of the 1990s, all Ukrainian students in secondary schools have at least one computer course as a mandatory element of their curriculum. This course covers a wide range of issues, which vary from information society theory to applied aspects of computer usage. Among the seven learning goals of this course three address digital

**Table 7** Preparation students feel they need before enrolling in distance education courses (More than one could be chosen)

| Country  | I would need better computer equipment | I would need better writing skills | I would need a dedicated study space | I would need to have learning objectives and goals | I would need better time management skills |
|----------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|          | Percent                                | Percent                            | Percent                              | Percent                                            | Percent                                    |
| Portugal | 12.73                                  | 14.55                              | 14.55                                | 25.45                                              | 25.45                                      |
| Ukraine  | 5.71                                   | 7.14                               | 12.86                                | 57.14                                              | 50.00                                      |
| UAE      | 16.84                                  | 25.26                              | 25.26                                | 27.37                                              | 32.63                                      |

**Table 8** Preparation students feel they need before enrolling in distance education courses (More than one could be chosen)

| Country  | I would need better computer skills<br>Percent | I would need better language skills (mainly English)<br>Percent | I would need a better Internet connection at home<br>Percent | I would need to develop a study plan<br>Percent | I would need to be more motivated<br>Percent |
|----------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Portugal | 27.27                                          | 27.27                                                           | 30.91                                                        | 34.55                                           | 38.18                                        |
| Ukraine  | 5.71                                           | 35.71                                                           | 8.57                                                         | 50.00                                           | 58.57                                        |
| UAE      | 35.79                                          | 36.84                                                           | 38.95                                                        | 44.21                                           | 45.26                                        |

literacy (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2017). Ukrainian students who responded to the survey have taken computer courses for at least 5 years.

In the UAE, most DE courses and programs are not accredited by the Ministry of Education (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2016), which may account for UAE students lack of experience and their inability to judge this type of instruction.

It is worth analyzing the reasons why students enrolled or would enroll in DE courses. The reasons for taking DE courses, such as time management issues, are supported by studies concerning self-regulation and higher retention rates (Bradley, Browne, & Kelley, 2017; Peck, Stefaniak, & Shah, 2018). Students' interest in having more control of their study time is also mentioned as one of the primary benefits of DE (Alahmari, 2017; Lei & Gupta, 2010). Regarding the reasons for not enrolling in DE courses, participants from the three countries mentioned difficulty contacting instructors and peers. Also, more than half of the students in Portugal and the UAE indicated they preferred face-to-face classes. Most students have spent their entire academic lives in traditional classes where interaction and immediate feedback from instructors and peers are more common. These concerns may be why students perceive they would lose a familiar type of interaction and have to engage with classroom participants in a new and different way (Carver & Kosloski Jr., 2015; Morris & Clark, 2018; Robinson & Hullinger, 2008; Summers, Waigandt, & Whittaker, 2005). It should be noted that the Portuguese and UAE students were enrolled in teacher education programs and are training to be face-to-face teachers. They may not understand the potential of DE format and are not preparing or expecting to use DE in their professional careers.

Difficulty being motivated was another reason chosen by the participants of the three countries to not enroll in DE courses. The lack of experience in this type of educational format may help explain student lack of confidence with their ability to study and stay on task. This response contrasts with the reasons reported for enrolling in DE courses such as controlling their study time. On one hand, participants like the prospect of having the ability to manage their own time. On the other hand, they are concerned they may lack the discipline they need to be successful.

**Table 9** Interest in enrolling in a distance education course

| Country  | Not at all interested<br>Percent | Not very interested<br>Percent | Neutral/ Unable to judge<br>Percent | Somewhat interested<br>Percent | Extremely interested<br>Percent |
|----------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Portugal | 18.18                            | 29.09                          | 25.45                               | 21.82                          | 5.45                            |
| Ukraine  | 4.29                             | 7.14                           | 21.43                               | 44.29                          | 22.86                           |
| UAE      | 14.74                            | 10.53                          | 31.58                               | 25.26                          | 17.89                           |

**Table 10** Types of distance education interested in trying (More than one could be chosen)

| Country  | MOOC (Massive Online Open Courses – a free course available on the Internet to a very large number of people) | I would not take a distance course | Asynchronous (Students and instructor do not meet at the same time online. All course work is done online.) |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | Percent                                                                                                       | Percent                            | Percent                                                                                                     |
| Portugal | 90.9                                                                                                          | 10.91                              | 12.73                                                                                                       |
| Ukraine  | 54.29                                                                                                         | 1.43                               | 30.00                                                                                                       |
| UAE      | 8.42                                                                                                          | 22.11                              | 24.21                                                                                                       |

Although the literature indicates that access to technology, isolation and expense are reasons frequently cited as preventing students from enrolling in DE courses (Lei & Gupta, 2010; Venter, 2003; Zuhairi et al., 2006), these reasons were selected by a very small percentage of the participants of this study. Access and affordability of technology has rapidly increased over the last decade which may help explain this inconsistency. Students may understand that DE courses are now less expensive than traditional university courses (Piletic, 2018) and they do not cite this as a reason for not enrolling. Relatively few students indicated they would feel isolated. Since this generation is in constant communication using technology (Diário de Notícias, 2011) they may not associate DE learning with isolation. However, it is interesting to note that there was a greater concern for interacting with instructors and peers than isolation.

The Ukrainian students are the most receptive to enrolling in DE courses. This is consistent with their positive perception of this type of learning. In addition, the previous experience of half of the participants may influence their interest as well as encourage their peers' receptivity. UAE students do not have much experience and fewer than half are open to enrolling in DE courses. This may be due to their lack of experience and other concerns previously mentioned. Only one third of the Portuguese participants indicated their interest in enrolling in DE courses. This is in contrast with almost two thirds saying they had a favorable or very favorable attitude. The reasons for this inconsistency are not evident.

In terms of preparation needed to take DE courses, technical concerns were less of an issue for the participants of all three countries than skills and behaviors. Most participants' answers focused on student skills including computer, English language and time management. Behaviors such as developing a study plan, having learning goals and objectives and being more motivated were also mentioned. The perceived need for better English language skills was expressed by about one third of the participants, none of whom have English as their native language. English speaking countries have been dominant in DE making English the most commonly used language in online

**Table 11** Types of distance education interested in trying (More than one could be chosen)

| Country  | Synchronous (Students and instructor meet at the same time online) | Blended learning (Some classes are taken online others face to face on campus) | Open schedule (Students study on their own time schedule) |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
|          | Percent                                                            | Percent                                                                        | Percent                                                   |
| Portugal | 25.45%                                                             | 29.09%                                                                         | 61.82%                                                    |
| Ukraine  | 30.00%                                                             | 52.86%                                                                         | 45.71%                                                    |
| UAE      | 31.58%                                                             | 42.11%                                                                         | 42.11%                                                    |

learning (Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009). Regarding time management, half of the Ukrainian students expressed their need for improvement in contrast to approximately one third of the participants from the other countries. The difference among responses may be because the Ukrainian students are more self-reflective, or the others are more disciplined. Although both DE and face-to-face courses have deadlines for tasks and assessments, in the face-to-face courses, students meet in person with their instructors who may support and press them to do their work. Lack of in person contact may account for the participants feeling they need to improve these skills when taking DE courses (De Paepe et al., 2018). Students expressed concerns about lacking certain skills and having certain behaviors that would lead them to be reluctant to enroll in DE courses. The need for help and preparation are some of the concerns that participants reported. Perceived needs may account for the students' apprehensions regarding taking DE courses. To promote this type of instruction, IHEs could address students' concerns (Mahlangu, 2018).

Open schedule and blended learning courses were the two preferred formats stated by the participants. The reason that Open schedule is the most popular may be that it provides more freedom than other types of courses. Blended learning offers the familiar face-to-face instruction and some of the conveniences of DE which may be why participants are interested in this model.

Studies regarding the use of MOOCs in all three countries have been conducted indicating that researchers in these locations are aware that this course format is of potential interest to local students (Eppard & Reddy, 2017; Gallacher, 2014; Gonçalves, Chumbo, Torres, & Gonçalves, 2016; Sharov, Liapunova, & Sharova, 2019; Strutynska & Umryk, 2016). Ukrainian students selected MOOCs much more than students in the other countries. The reason for this may be that these students are more knowledgeable about MOOCs, because this type of course is usually at no cost and/or offered by prestigious IHEs (Cormier et al., 2010). However, this study did not ask why students were interested in MOOCs or other types of DE courses.

### **Limitations and future research**

While this study offers useful information regarding undergraduate students' perception and receptivity in taking DE courses, it has limited generalizability because of the size of the sample and the type of statistical analysis performed. Participants from two of the countries were enrolled in teacher education programs and were primarily female, thus future studies would benefit from including more students in diverse programs and a more equitable gender distribution.

Since many IHEs also offer programs for graduate students it would be useful to survey these students about their opinion and availability to enroll in DE courses. This would provide additional information for IHEs that are interested in developing DE programs.

There were some inconsistencies in the students' responses such as Portuguese students' interest in enrolling in DE courses not matching their favorable/ very favorable attitude towards DE. It would be helpful to conduct future research regarding this and other inconsistencies.

A study is currently being planned to collect data that will provide a larger and more diverse sample and include additional IHEs. This future research will potentially increase the available knowledge on how to provide DE for a greater number of students.



### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Further development of DE courses and programs at IHEs in countries such as Portugal, UAE and Ukraine have good prospects. The students' primary concerns regarding taking DE courses were similar among the three countries. These concerns included time management, motivation, and English language skills. However, this did not totally diminish participants interest in taking online courses especially for the Ukrainian students.

Based on this research, there are some obstacles that can be addressed to support the expansion of DE in the three countries that were studied and in other countries. The following recommendations may assist IHEs in promoting DE.

#### **Recommendations for preparation within IHEs**

IHEs can take proactive steps to prepare DE offerings, however, a one-size fit all model may not be appropriate for all countries and IHEs. Each institution needs to develop their own plan that meets the needs of their students and faculty. Data from this pilot study and the literature (Elbaum, McIntyre, & Smith, 2002; Hashim & Tasir, 2014; Hux et al., 2018) suggest that following steps might be taken:

- Assess readiness to take DE courses through a survey and have students speak with counselors.
- Provide pre-DE courses to build skills and behaviors based on students' concerns.
- Train instructors to develop and deliver DE courses that help to overcome obstacles such as motivation and time management.
- Offer courses in a blended learning format to familiarize students with online learning which may provide a transitional model.

#### **Recommendations for IHE outreach**

This study shows that there is some student interest in enrolling in online courses. It is not sufficient for IHEs to make changes internally within their own institution. IHEs need to develop external strategies and actions that help advance the development of DE:

- Promote DE in social media to target potential students and encourage them to take courses.
- Urge government agencies to accredit DE courses and programs.

This pilot study provides some background information that may help IHEs to offer DE courses. Additional research about students' preferences and needs regarding DE should be conducted. The sample size, IHEs included and participating countries could be expanded in order to gain a greater understanding.

Different cultural characteristics need to be taken into account in the development of online courses and programs. DE is being increasingly included by IHEs all around the world. To stay current, universities will need to find ways to offer DE to their current and prospective students.

# **Rural Online Learning in the Context of COVID-19 in South Africa: Evoking an Inclusive Education Approach**

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*(Received: 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020; Accepted: 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020; Published: 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020)*

## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the challenges faced by rural learners in South Africa in the context of the world pandemic commonly known as COVID-19. Rural learners face unprecedented challenges in adjusting to a new mode of life and learning, the latter being characterised by the predominant use of online, learning management systems and low-tech applications. The paper is informed by critical emancipatory research, which argues for social justice, empowerment and social inclusion of all learners in teaching and learning, with the aim of constructing better futures for all learners. To generate data, I used participatory action research. A total of 10 learners and five teachers participated via WhatsApp. The paper answers two questions: what are the learning challenges faced by rural learners in South Africa, and how can online learning be enhanced in the context of COVID-19? The findings suggest that, while the South African government is promoting online learning as the only alternative in the context of COVID-19, this mode excludes many rural learners from teaching and learning, due to a lack of resources to connect to the internet, the learning management system, and low-tech software. Based on the findings of this study, the paper argues that rural learners are critical stakeholders in education and in the fight against COVID-19, and they cannot be left behind in efforts to fight the pandemic. Values such as social justice and the rights of rural learners should not be foregone in the fight against COVID-19.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, rurality, online learning, human rights, inclusion

# **Aprendizaje Rural Online en el Contexto de COVID-19 en Sudáfrica: Evocando un Enfoque de Educación Inclusiva**

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*(Recibido: 5 Mayo 2020; Aceptado: 11 Mayo 2020; Publicado: 13 Mayo 2020)*

## **Resumen**

Este artículo discute los desafíos de los estudiantes rurales en Sudáfrica en el contexto de la pandemia mundial del COVID-19. Estos estudiantes se enfrentan a desafíos sin precedentes para adaptarse a un nuevo modo de vida y aprendizaje, caracterizado por el uso predominante de sistemas de gestión de aprendizaje en línea y aplicaciones tecnológicas. El artículo presenta una investigación crítica de emancipación, que defiende la justicia social, el empoderamiento y la inclusión social de todos los alumnos en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje, con el objetivo de construir un futuro mejor para todos los alumnos. El diseño parte de una investigación de acción participativa. Un total de 10 alumnos y 5 profesores participaron a través de WhatsApp. El documento responde a dos preguntas: ¿cuáles son los desafíos de aprendizaje que enfrentan los estudiantes rurales en Sudáfrica y cómo se puede mejorar el aprendizaje en línea en el contexto de COVID-19? Los resultados sugieren que, si bien el gobierno de Sudáfrica está promoviendo el aprendizaje en línea como la única alternativa en el contexto de COVID-19, este modo excluye a muchos estudiantes rurales de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje, debido a la falta de recursos para conectarse a Internet, sistema de gestión de aprendizaje y software de baja tecnología. Con base en los hallazgos de este estudio, el documento argumenta que los estudiantes rurales son actores críticos en la educación y en la lucha contra COVID-19, y no pueden quedarse atrás en los esfuerzos para combatir la pandemia. Valores como la justicia social y los derechos de los estudiantes rurales no deben ser renunciados en la lucha contra COVID-19.

**Palabras clave:** COVID-19, ruralidad, aprendizaje online, derechos humanos, inclusión.

2020 Hipatia Press

ISSN: 2014-2862

DOI: 10.4471/remie.2020.5607

**T**his paper was written at the time a pandemic known as COVID-19 was ravaging the world, and which changed the way of life of many people. The pandemic has required drastic measures to be pursued as a way of limiting the spread of the virus. One of the measures taken by the South African government to address the spread of COVID-19 was to prohibit public gatherings, enact social distancing and close schools, which required a move to online teaching and learning. While the move to online teaching and learning, as opposed to the traditional approach to education, was inevitable, many learners in rural contexts now find themselves excluded from schooling and unable to access online resources, due to a lack of infrastructure, the unavailability of electricity and electronic gadgets, and a lack of qualified teachers who can assist with online learning. It appears that online learning favours urban and well-privileged learners, thus, widening the gap between the poor and the rich, instead of uniting the nation in the fight against COVID-19.

South Africa gained independence from British rule in 1994 and, today, most people still live in rural areas. Because there is no fixed definition of rurality, this paper defines it as the composition of human settlements which have agricultural production as the main economic activity, or a place isolated from urban areas. Rural areas are remote places found in the countryside, in forests and mountains. Typically, rural people lack access to socio-economic amenities, such as quality education, good health services, transport, marketing facilities, and even electricity. Rural people often live nomadic lives – they are pastoralists and fishermen (Avila, & Gasperini, 2005). Generally, and particularly with reference to South Africa, rural areas mostly lack the social and economic viability needed to sustain technological improvement (Cristobal-Fransi, Montegut-Salla, Ferrer-Rosell, & Daries, 2020).

Hall (2019) reports that South Africa had 11252 schools in rural areas across the country and, of these, 3060 were secondary schools and 8 192 primary schools. The majority of these schools are in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, which are mostly rural provinces. These three provinces alone are home to about three-quarters (72%) of all rural children in South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal has the largest child population in numeric terms, with 2.6 million (62%) of its child population being classified as rural

(Hall, 2019). According to the World Bank (2018) 33% of the South African population may be classified as rural. Governments find it more difficult to supply quality education services in rural areas, and various factors weaken the quality of learning and teaching in South Africa's rural areas (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This observation is supported by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2015), which explains that rural education formed a large part of South Africa's history. While acknowledging the progress the country has made, not enough attention has been given to rural education, which necessitates redress. Some learners in cities are already using online learning and, all learners will write the same examination at the end of the year. Thus, COVID-19 and the implementation of online learning has magnified the challenges faced by rural learners and teachers. Rural teachers and learners are deprived of useful information, education and skills, which are essential for community development, self-development and the fight against COVID-19. Thus, I agree with Dieltiens (2008, p. 40), that "rural schools certainly have problems particular to them; predicaments which require systemic effort and creative ideas most. Rural areas already face tremendous barriers to high learner attainment and operate in less than favourable policy environments".

Cognisant of the foregoing argument, researchers confirm that the predominant measure against the spread of COVID-19 is ensuring social distancing, self-isolating, and prohibiting people from gathering in large numbers (Krishnakumar & Rana, 2020). These prescriptions represent a blow to rural learners, who are taught using a traditional classroom setup, where a teacher is visible to students, and the teacher monitors learning at close range. Thus, in the time of COVID-19, the traditional approach to teaching is no longer permissible, and there is a need to invent new ways of teaching, such as online learning, using learning management systems (like Blackboard), which, unfortunately, is new to many students in rural areas, leading to the fear that education during the time of COVID will serve a few privileged students who are connected to resources. The situation was exacerbated by the South African government responding to COVID-19 by shutting down what is deemed non-essential services, which affected many rural families whose members earn their livelihood selling vegetables or doing casual labour for wages. I raise this issue, because the lockdown caused

many people to lose their income, which could have assisted them to set up a conducive online learning environment for their children.

To buttress the foregoing, Ebrahim, Ahmed, Gozzer, Schlagenhauf and Memish (2020) argue that the state of lockdown halted the economic services and products of the Global South, including South Africa. To this end, rural learners and teachers are seemingly helpless on how to approach online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown, and, therefore, the chasm between the haves and the have nots gets ever deeper.

The argument of the paper is that, while COVID-19 has made online learning inevitable, and online learning is a practicable alternative to traditional schooling, there is need for an inclusive approach that caters for the lived realities of rural learners. The paper is opposed to instituting measures to fight COVID-19 that isolate some sections of the population merely because they are in deprived communities, with inadequate access to electricity, network connectivity and expertise, which is an integral part of successful online teaching and learning.

Thus, as argued by Nkoane (2010, p. 113–114), I am “opposed to any classroom practices that undermine the rights of rural learners”. Informed by this argument, I agree with Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), that there is a need to put strategies in place to improve the working conditions of teachers and the teaching at rural schools, to improve learner achievement across the rural areas of South Africa, and to ensure a better future for and development of human capital emanating from rural contexts.

In short, in the context of COVID-19 and learning, as Shibeshi (2006) suggests, the solutions implemented should respond to the needs of rural people, and should consider their diversity – agro-ecological, geographical and socio-economic and cultural. The paper is unique in the sense that it outlines the lived realities of rural teachers and learners and argues the rights of learners in the fight against COVID-19, and regarding online learning, are respected. The paper is organised as follows. Next, the paper discusses the theoretical framing, which is critical emancipatory research, I will explain participatory action research (PAR), and present and discuss the findings.



### **Theoretical Framing: Critical Emancipatory Research**

I used Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) as a theoretical lens to interrogate learning in the context of COVID-19. CER is an offshoot of the critical theory of Germany's Frankfurt School for Social Research, which had been established at the University of Frankfurt in 1923 and, in particular, CER is based on the work of "Habermas, who was influenced by Marxist perspective on economic and social questions" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 51). Some scholars, such as McKernan (2013), trace the ideas of CER to Emmanuel Kant, a German philosopher, who first hinted at critical theory in 1871.

There is a general understanding among scholars that CER arose as a product of a "Marxist think tank founded by a wealthy son of a German millionaire, Mr Weil, who helped the Frankfurt School to create an innovative brand of philosophically oriented radical social science" (McLaughlin, 1999, p. 109). Nkoane (2013, p. 99) argues that the CER proponents at the Frankfurt School represented a left-wing group that had "philosophical roots in several traditions such as Marx's analysis of socio-economic conditions and class structure, Habermas's notion of emancipatory knowledge and Freire's transformative and emancipatory pedagogy". Demirovic (2009) explains that the CER scholars sought to explain and encourage participation, to shape the world into a better place for all. To do so, CER scholars problematised "historical and social conditions of crisis, oppression, inequality and replace them with emancipatory ones" (Sinnerbrink, 2012, p. 370).

Thus, in the context of COVID-19, and with particular reference to rural learning in South Africa, there is need for conditions that would emancipate learners and promote social and learning conditions. It will enable rural learners to benefit from online learning, which has been seen as a tool to address trajectories during the times of crisis, not only for survival (by communicating essential information on the fight against COVID-19), but also for teaching and learning by members of deprived communities, such as those of rural schools.

I see CER as a relevant theory to address the challenges of learning in the time of COVID-19, because one of the objectives of the theory is to enable marginalised people, such as rural teachers, learners and education

stakeholders, to unleash their human power and potential and transform their otherwise transient situation (Mahlomaholo, 2013). In short, CER is a theory that seeks to ensure that everyone is included in life-transforming experiences that could emancipate individuals, so that they can confront their lived realities, while at the same time respecting rural leaders through promoting values such as social justice, inclusion and human rights in the fight against COVID-19.

### **Methodology: Participatory Action Research**

This qualitative study is located within the broader space of the transformative paradigm. It used PAR to generate data from the participants. I chose PAR methodology because it is an approach that encourages active participation of affected people to construct their new identities. The approach has an underlying philosophy that states that the people with the problem can suggest effective solutions for their problems.

To this end, the participants in this study were rural learners and teachers who were experiencing trouble with online teaching and learning – a problem that was intensified by the presence of the global pandemic of COVID-19. Another reason for using PAR for this study is that it “investigates the actual practices and not abstract practices and learning about the real, material, concrete, and particular practices of particular people in particular places” (Kemmis, S, & McTaggart, 2007, p. 277). By doing so, Cornwall and Jewkes (1995, p. 1674) argue, PAR “identifies the rights of those concerned by the research, and empowering people to set their own schemas for research and development, thereby giving them tenure over the process”.

Furthermore, I chose PAR since it resonates well with CER, in that PAR reveals and challenges conditions of injustice (Loewenson, Laurell, Hogstedt, D’Ambruoso, & Shroff, 2014). In short, PAR was chosen as a methodology which avoids univocal research representations, and promotes the adoption of techniques from multiple perspectives, voices, and sources to solve composite class challenges (Rogers, 2012).

To collect data, in line with the need for social distancing, a WhatsApp group was created involving 15 participants, which included 10 learners in Grade 10, aged between 14 and 17, and five teachers at rural schools in the

KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. Purposeful sampling was used for this study. In addition, the snowball or chain method was used to recruit participants, whereby participants were requested to identify other possible participants who could provide useful data for the study (Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

The participation of the group members was guided by two research questions, namely, 1) what are the learning challenges faced by rural learners in South Africa, and 2) how can online learning be enhanced in the context of COVID-19? The following table gives details of the research participants in terms of the age, grade, and general location of their schools. Pseudo names are used to protect the identities.

Table 1.  
*Characteristics of the participants*

| <i>Pseudonym</i>  | <i>Age</i> | <i>Location of the rural school</i> | <i>Grade or Subject</i> |
|-------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Sipho (Learner)   | 16         | UTHukela                            | Grade 11                |
| Zuzu (Learner)    | 15         | UTHukela                            | Grade 10                |
| Nnuku (learner)   | 16         | UMkhanyakude                        | Grade 11                |
| Mpilo (Learner)   | 14         | UMkhanyakude                        | Grade 9                 |
| Velo (learner)    | 15         | Harry Gwala                         | Grade 9                 |
| Dlodlo (Teacher)  | 40         | UTHukela                            | English/ IsiZulu        |
| Zalo (Learner)    | 17         | Harry Gwala                         | Grade 12                |
| Busi (Learner)    | 16         | Harry Gwala                         | Grade 11                |
| Mzi (Learner)     | 15         | UMkhanyakude                        | Grade 10                |
| Rams (Teacher)    | 44         | Harry Gwala                         | Mathematics             |
| Mzamo (Learner)   | 14         | UTHukela                            | Grade 9                 |
| Simiso (Learner)  | 15         | UMkhanyakude                        | Grade 9                 |
| Xoli (Teacher)    | 30         | UMkhanyakude                        | Life Science            |
| Senzo (Learner)   | 17         | UMkhanyakude                        | Grade 12                |
| Msebele (Teacher) | 52         | UTHukela                            | Geography               |

To ensure ethical considerations, participants were asked for consent to participate in the study. It was assured that pseudonyms would be used, that no-one was obliged to participate in the study, and that they could decide to withdraw from the study for any reason (Fritz, 2008). In addition, collected

data would only be used for academic purposes, and to raise the awareness of the Department of Basic Education about the realities faced by rural learners in the fight against COVID-19, particularly, teaching and learning online.

WhatsApp discussions took place for over five days with the 15 participants, during which we reflected on the two questions for two hours a day. Ground rules were set by all participants so that the group achieve its purpose. As the discussions were going via WhatsApp text message, it was ensured that rural learners remained focused on COVID-19 discussions.

Data generated through PAR was subjected to the thematic approach suggested by Laws, Harper and Marcus (2003, p. 395), which comprises the following steps:

- **Step 1** Reading and rereading all the collected data: The data from the discussions was read and reread, so that I heard the views of the participants.
- **Step 2** Drawing up a preliminary list of themes arising from the data: Major issues and themes were identified and arranged according to the two main research questions of the study.
- **Step 3** Rereading the data. I checked if the themes we had identified accurately represented what the participants had said, and that they related to the research questions.
- **Step 4** Linking the themes to quotations and notes: The themes that emerged from the data were linked to various scholarly views.
- **Step 5** Perusing the categories of themes to interpret them: In the interpretation of data, I remained cognisant of the research questions.
- **Step 6** Designing a tool to assist in discerning patterns in the data in order to triangulate and determine the patterns during data analysis.
- **Step 7** Interpreting the data and deriving meaning: This step mainly relates to highlighting the research findings and arranging material according to categories, which are premised on or guided by the research questions.

To ensure the validity of the findings, I conducted member checking, during which process I presented the analysed data that had been thematised

to participants to obtain confirmation that the data responded to their lived experiences in the context of COVID-19, specifically, teaching and learning using online platform (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Bygstad & Munkvold, 2007; Gunawan, 2015). This allowed me and the participants to analyse the collected data to see if it reflected their contributions on COVID 19 and rurality. In the following section, I will present data gleaned during the WhatsApp discussions.

## **Results and Discussion**

The first section of the findings will address Question 1, which is, what are the challenges faced by rural learners and teachers on the use of online as alternative during the COVID-19?

### **Challenges of Online Learning in Rural Areas**

In response to the first question, participants raised a number of issues, which are summarised by pointing out the main themes that arose from participating in this research. Next, I discuss the first challenge, the unavailability of network access in rural schools.

**Unavailability of network in rural areas.** It emerged during the research that, in spite of online learning seeming to be one of the best ways of learning during the COVID-19 period, the innovation is hampered by the unavailability of connectivity in some rural contexts. During the discussion, the participants gave different responses. On the one hand, Muzi<sup>1</sup> reported that “most of the learners in rural areas are experiencing the problem with network, it is hard for them to access online learning material provided by the department of basic education”. On the other hand, Senzo added:

Yaa this is a serious challenge, it is not that we do not want online learning, it is because there is no or sometimes very limited network which makes it difficult for me to teach learners. This thing is only working for those in towns where network is always available.

Gorge said:

This online learning thing is like giving some one pots to cook without food and expect you have addressed his or her needs. Am scared that this year will be wasted because of COVID-19 and online learning that does favour us as rural learners

The essence of the participants' views is that they are not prepared to do online learning, due to limited or no network access. This implies that, while the idea to use online learning to compensate for the loss of face-to-face contact, is noble, it does not include all learners. To this end, World Bank (2020) points out that the students who will be able to make the best use of online learning are those who are already competent and knowledgeable about using technology tools to support their learning, online sources in particular, who have sufficient access to good bandwidth and connected devices, and who are supported by their family and peers.

It is clear that the COVID-19 arrangement, though noble, is exclusive in its nature, and excludes many learners in deprived communities. Thus, informed by CER, it is an injustice to institute systems and structures in education that exclude some on the basis of poverty, or because they live in deprived communities. In addition, the lack of connectivity does not only place a damper on academic matters, but also on strategies that are implemented in various contexts to fight COVID-19. In essence, the lack of connectivity affects online education and prevents access to information, which is essential in the fight against COVID-19.

**Shortage of devices for online learning.** Another challenge raised by research participants is the lack of devices to connect for online learning. The devices mentioned by the participants included cell phones, computers, laptops and smart phones that are compatible with low-tech teaching apps, such as Blackboard. During the discussion, the participants made the following comments. First, Simiso, a school learner, said:

The school head teacher sent a message to us that we will start with online learning, and to me this was new and was confused because at home we do not have even a single laptop or smartphones, the one I am



using for WhatsApp, is a borrowed phone and the owner can ask for it any time.

Second, Mzamo added that “online learning would be very difficult for me because of the COVID-19 lockdown, I would have visited my uncle in town who would have helped me with a laptop to study, but not I cannot move at all”. And Rams, a teacher, added:

I have a laptop but that would not help much since my learners are not having gadgets to complete the tasks that I would have given them. Sometimes, I try to use WhatsApp, I see that most learners are not online or simply do not have devices to support online learning.

In this regard, I agree with an observation by the World Bank (2020), that the move to online learning at scale typically benefits students already advantaged in various ways disproportionately (e.g., rich over poor, urban over rural, high-performing over low-performing, students in highly educated families over students in less well educated families).

**Closure of internet cafés.** During the research it emerged that most of the rural learners and educators relied on internet cafés for their online needs, which, according to the lockdown regulations, were closed, which worsened rural learners’ access to online learning. During the discussions the participants said the following. Mzi, a rural learner, said that “the closest internet café is closed and if it was opened, I would not have managed to do online learning since it is expensive and overcrowded since everyone in the community uses the internet café”. Busi, a learner, added “Besides being closed, internet café has very poor connectivity, is very poor in our internet café and just imagine when I am expected to use online learning for all my ten subjects. That would not work at all.”

It is clear that lockdown, as a strategy to fight COVID-19, contributed to the plight of rural learners. Thus, lack of facilities or closure of internet cafés defeats the purpose of championing online learning as a strategy to combat COVID-19. Therefore, it is critical that the Department of Education provides more centres at which learners can access online material free of charge, or at

a limited amount, to ensure that most learners have access to the learning material.

**Lack of computer skills of some rural teachers.** In addition to the issues relating to lack of internet gadgets and connectivity, the research participants also reported that most rural teachers in South Africa are unable to use online learning apps, which makes it difficult for these teachers to help learners. During the discussion, Mpilo, a teacher, said “In my school, I know some of the colleagues that cannot even operate a computer. He trained as a teacher 30 years ago when computers were not common in South Africa including in teachers colleagues.” And Zalo added that “some teachers do not know these things, in my school, I always assist my teachers with software or application for various things, and relying on such teachers to help with online teaching will be a waste of time.”

Considering the points raised by participants, it is clear that the effectiveness of any curriculum implementation will be related to the competencies of the user system. Thus, if the training of teachers has been compromised, it will translate to incompetency in curriculum execution. I agree with Schwartz (2006, p. 450) that,

“curriculum writers, with all good intentions have compiled volumes of well-conceived educational action plans, choosing specific materials and activities for their pre-conceived target, curriculum receivers, students, only to find that the curriculum users, teachers, are not prepared for the innovations”.

To buttress the foregoing argument further, World Bank (2020) argues that very few classroom teachers have received training in online instructional approaches and tools. If teachers are to support online learning by their students while schools are closed, they will need to be prepared to do so before schools are closed (World Bank, 2020).

Therefore, as I discuss below, the Department of Basic Education should invest in teacher capacitation, which would assist teachers and learners to engage in online teaching and learning, effectively and efficiently, in the face of COVID-19.

**Expensive internet data.** During the research, the participants also reported that data is too expensive to facilitate effective online learning. The situation is worsened by the fact that some parents lost their jobs due to the lockdown, which prevents them from buying and selling, which seems to be the main source of income of many rural communities in South Africa. During the discussion, Velo said that “While we wish to engage in online learning as a way to avoid the spread of COVID-19, the problem is that data is very expensive and beyond the reach of many in rural communities”. Sipho, who lives with a grandmother, added:

My grandmother is not working. She only gets government grant and that grant is too little for us to survive a month, what more if that money is also going to be used for buying data. This simple means that some of us have been structurally excluded in schools by this thing of online.

From the discussion above, it is clear that the issue of data is a serious impediment to online learning, and it is critical that the cost of data is reduced to accommodate deprived communities. Alternatively, the Department of Basic Education should provide free access to learning material, to assist learners, or provide data that is tailor-made for learning purposes, should they fear learners will misuse the data for non-academic purposes.

In short, the research revealed that expensive data impedes online learning, which disadvantages learners and teachers, not only in academia, but also in the fight against COVID-19. The following section, I will address research question two.

### **Enhancing Online Teaching and Learning in Rural Schools in the Context of COVID-19**

The paper does not only highlight the problem, but also presents possible solutions suggested by the teachers and learners to ensure that teaching and learning processes continue during the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, in this section, I will respond to Question 2 of the paper, which is, how can online learning be enhanced in the context of COVID-19? The first suggestion was that there is need for all-inclusive education.

**Social inclusive learning approach.** As part of the solution, the research participants discussed the need for an inclusive approach to online teaching and learning. Inclusive approach, as used in this paper, “concerns quality in the distribution of an education service, and it also concerns the nature of the service itself and the consequences for society through time” (Connell, 2012, p. 681). It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has created or widened the gap between the rich and the poor, or urban learners and rural learners. Education during the time of COVID-19 should not violate the rights of learners, despite their geographical location. This suggestion resonates with Mag, Sinfield and Burns (2017), who state that inclusive education is a child’s right, not a privilege, and, as such, any approach to education during COVID-19 must be premised on respect for human rights, that involves that all the needs of learners’ are catered for by the teaching and learning process. In a discussion, Zuzu indicated:

Indeed we want to learn, forgoing 2020 academic year is disastrous to already suffering rural learners who look at education as the only alternative to escape deprived circumstances. Simply I want to finish my studies and, the Department of Basic Education should find ways to ensure I am included as a rural learner.

In this line, Nnuku added:

The way this thing of online learning is done seems to favour the rich and those in the cities. It won’t be fair for us to write the same examination with them since we do not have access to online resources. There is need to ensure that rural learners benefit as much as town learners concerning online learning.

An inclusive approach would be the best, desirable and doable in the fight against COVID-19, and would also ensure that no child is left behind due to this global pandemic. I agree with Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998, p. 74), who argue that the inclusive approach is purposeful, and builds commitment towards positive change.

Oloruntegbe and Collins (2011) state that successful reforms are initiated from the grassroots (bottom-up), particularly by teachers and learners who

have first-hand experience of the realities of online learning in the context of COVID-19. Through such an inclusive approach, the preservation of an oppressive status quo is challenged, and social transformation that values social justice can be achieved (Ngwenyama, 1991).

**Equal access to learning resources.** One of the suggestions that learners made concerns supplying learners with learning devices to facilitate online teaching and learning. This recommendation was made against the background that some city schools are either buying or lending learners devices to ensure that learning continues in the context of COVID-19 (Parliament Monitoring Group, 2020).

According to Mahlomaholo (2009), CER seems to be one of the most potent means of creating conditions under which this distorted learning environments can be subverted, and a positive academic identity cultivated. During the discussion, Xoli, a teacher said:

It is important that government assists the less privileged learners in rural schools with devices that they can use for online learning like what is happening with other learners in city schools. I think the government has capacity to assist as long the principle of equity is followed rather than equality

Velo added that:

Once we get resources and cheap data we can at least try to learn like the city learners. Since the government is able to supply some rural communities with either cheap or free electricity, I am sure they can be able to supply with cheap or free data for rural learners and teachers

Providing data will go a long way to ensure the success of online learning, especially for rural learners. In this way, providing data is expected to address the lived realities of people, offer solutions and facilitate the improvement of human lives (Koopman, 2013; Geduld & Sathorar, 2016; Mbatha, 2016).

**Providing teachers trained in online teaching and learning.** In this study, the issue of teacher incapacity to handle online learning was raised as a

challenge. The research also revealed that there is need for the Department of Basic Education to cease assuming that all teachers are able to execute online learning. Workshops should be conducted online to equip teachers on the way to handle on line learning. Dlodlo, a teacher, said “All we need is training on online and once we get how it is done, am sure it will be easy for us to assist learners in this regard. In this line, Msebele added “once we get training, the challenges we are facing now as teachers could be addressed and then we begin to help learners”

To this end, I argue that teachers need to be empowered in unthreatening ways, as teacher knowledge is the biggest factor in the implementation of the curriculum (Quyen & Khairani, 2017). In addition, education system managers must be aware of their teachers’ ability levels, and must set expectations accordingly (David, Pellini, Jordan, & Phillips, 2020).

Ultimately, I conclude that, while it is important to go online in the context of COVID-19, it is critical to consider the observation of Stabback (2011), that the Department of Basic Education in South Africa needs to take into account where the country is, in terms of the current breadth and depth of the curriculum; learners’ attainment levels; the quality of teachers; and the range and effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment practices.

This knowledge will assist to address the challenge cited by De Clercq (2013), namely that, the majority of teachers have deeply ingrained negativity and scepticism towards their jobs and developmental programmes aimed at improving the lives of learners. In fact, if teachers are not equipped with online learning skills, they will become even more negative and sabotage the teaching and learning process, which will, eventually, deprive other rural learners.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the findings, the study recommends that rural learners and educators should have access to data that allows them to engage in an online learning process. The greatest challenge faced with online education is that Internet connection is very expensive and, in some cases, very limited. Thus, it is critical that the Department of Basic Education invest in ensuring that all



learners have access to Internet connection to enhance teaching and learning during the time COVID-19 crisis.

In addition, the study recommends that the Department of Basic Education provide learners and teachers with devices they can use for online learning, and to gain access to information that relates to the fight against COVID-19. These devices can include smartphones, tablets, or general phones that support installation of learning packages such as Blackboard. In addition, the study recommends that teachers must be capacitated on online learning, so that they can assist learners.

Finally, the study suggests that the government and the Department of Basic Education should ensure that the global division between the rich and the poor, or between rural areas and the city, is not widened during COVID-19 by concentrating its efforts not only on privileged learners. Lives of rural learners matter too.

In short, the paper outlined the challenges relating to online learning encountered by rural learners and teachers in South Africa during the COVID-19 world pandemic. The paper was couched in CER and responded to two questions. PAR was used as a methodology for the study, in which 15 participants from rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, took part. The study found that learners and teachers have difficulties with online learning, which frustrates efforts to teach and learn.

I argue in this paper that in the fight against COVID-19, it is critical that human rights, especially those of rural learners, are respected. Furthermore, the Department of Basic Education should take an all-inclusive approach to addressing the lived realities of rural learners. When all people are included in all processes, including learning, it will facilitate the easy flow of information, which is essential in the fight against COVID-19.

## Notes

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

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## Article

# Parents' Perspectives on Remote Learning in the Pandemic Context

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**Abstract:** In the spring of 2020, when the entire education system worldwide switched to distance learning, parents became key learning agents, helping students to understand how to continue learning, how to use digital solutions and how to support students in this process. This article summarizes parents' views on the distance learning process and the challenges they faced. This is part of a larger study carried out within the project "Life with COVID-19: Evaluation of the overcoming coronavirus crisis in Latvia and recommendations for social resilience in the future" (CoLife), which was launched in Latvia in the summer of 2020 and analyzed what digital learning tools schools can use to support students in their learning. Parents' views on 738 school-age children (313 responses about 1st–4th graders; 362 responses for 5th–9th graders and 63 responses for 10th–12th graders) were obtained, and the main conclusions were that after parents became learning agents, they would have liked more support from educators to understand how to support their children in the learning process. Parents would also have liked schools to be interested in how their children are doing and whether everything necessary is available. Overall, it can be concluded that in this crisis, parents tried to support their children, and in most cases, it was the mothers of the students who provided this support, but it was primarily based on the need to use digital technologies, which means that children whose parents do not use digital technologies may be more exposed to the danger of falling into a risk group with larger educational gaps.

**Keywords:** remote learning; homeschooling; parent support; parent voice; COVID-19; pandemic discourse; general education



**Citation:** Daniela, L.; Rubene, Z.; Rūdolfā, A. Parents' Perspectives on Remote Learning in the Pandemic Context. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 3640. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073640>

Academic Editor: Giuseppe Battaglia

Received: 20 February 2021

Accepted: 23 March 2021

Published: 25 March 2021

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## 1. Introduction and Background

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of educational institutions were closed, and education was transposed to remote learning, reaching the level of the complete closure of schools in 130 countries (out of 193) on 31 March 2020; educational institutions were partially open in four countries, fully open in two countries (Turkmenistan and Belarus), and in all other countries, an academic break started [1]. There was a shock in general education, where until now learning had traditionally been organized as a face-to-face learning process, in which students learn under the guidance of a teacher, as, in a few days, this learning process had to be transformed into remote education [2], and the concept of "homeschooling", from its prior understanding of being a way to provide education at home to certain groups of people [3–7], suddenly became a general form of education and parents became accidental homeschoolers [8,9]. In this situation, a large role was played by the parents of the students, who had to become homeschoolers within a few days without prior training. While parental involvement has previously been analyzed as necessary but often insufficient [10,11], parents were now the ones who helped students to learn digital skills, helped them to learn and helped them to understand how to organize the learning process of children in a balance with other daily responsibilities.

Parents also had to help children to overcome emotional problems caused by their inability to meet their friends. Parents usually want their children to learn well, to be fully

present in life, to be responsible and motivated and to be successful in defining the concept of flourishing in life [12], but these parental desires are mostly related to the education system. This article analyzes the role of parents in the remote learning process, wherein parents have been learning agents in the homeschooling process, and uses a social approach to the learning agents' perspective [13].

The unexpected turn in education provision caused by the pandemic created various challenges, which can be described both as problems in achieving learning goals and growing social inequality gaps. It would not be an overstatement to say that the parents of the students were one of the most important learning agents at this stage to enable the learning process to take place rather than let the educational processes stop and to enable the students to achieve at least some of their learning goals [14–16]. Students' learning achievements depend to a large extent on their parents' ability to provide this support [17], which can be linked to the parents' own knowledge of different subjects and their ability to use digital tools and teach their children. This opportunity to learn also depended on the social situation of families, whether or not children could be provided with digital devices to access learning content from home, whether the child had the opportunity to set up their own learning space or whether parents had the opportunity to monitor the learning process because there were parents whose work was related to the provision of important functions, such as medicine, emergency services and the supply of goods. Similarly, parents whose daily work responsibilities required them to continue to perform their duties online were less likely to be involved in supporting their children. Single parents, or parents who became ill with COVID-19 themselves, could not be so fully involved in the children's homeschooling process. Studies have already shown that families with higher incomes and higher levels of parental education are better able to cope with this crisis and are satisfied with the benefits of distance learning [18–20]. Based on this, it can naturally be concluded that not all students are in the same position with regard to the acquisition of education in this remote learning process, so it is important to understand the parents' views and wishes in order to be able to support them in their role as learning agents in homeschooling. One benefit of parents' in-depth involvement in the learning process is that they became more aware of what their children needed to learn and were able to discuss issues that were important to them. It was also found that parents are the ones who motivate students to learn more and provide them with social and emotional support when they face learning difficulties [21–25]. Parents also praised teachers' work, which they had not appreciated before [22]. There is also evidence that this crisis could be a turning point in the learning habits of many students, with less emphasis on following teacher instructions and more on self-regulated learning [6].

However, despite the benefits that parents experienced during homeschooling, there were also different challenges they faced. Aspects of wellbeing were also important; when parents had to think about providing their children with technical devices, they also had to teach children who had not used them before, and at the same time, parents themselves had to continue to perform their work duties to ensure the continuation of their home life. They were also stressed about the possibility of illness and about the possibility of losing or having already lost work and relationships. Various studies have shown that parents feel that they are not able to help children sufficiently in remote learning [21] because they do not fully understand the principles of learning, do not have specific knowledge on particular subjects and feel isolated, and this points to the need to analyze parents' views in order to define possible forms of cooperation between schools and children's parents. Currently, the data collected show that the pandemic has had a more negative impact on women, but at the same time, that home care is still perceived to be the responsibility of women and the responsibility for support for children's learning lies more directly with mothers [14,26,27]. In this study, more answers to the questions were given by mothers (the questionnaire was completed by mothers for 661 students out of 738), which confirms the assumption that mothers are more involved in the provision of learning support.

In this situation, when parents had to become agents of accidental homeschooling [8,9], there are both benefits and various risks that need to be considered when planning post-crisis support to fill the education gap, as modeled in the World Bank study [18], where it was concluded that, depending on what kind of models are used to assess possible scenarios, there will be losses after a pandemic. The chances of recovering from them will depend on the financial resources invested by countries in bridging this education gap and the policy decisions taken, as well as the extent to which parents are able to support their children during this period of distance learning to keep the potential gap as small as possible [18].

The main goal of the research project “Life with COVID-19: Evaluation of overcoming the coronavirus crisis in Latvia and recommendations for social resilience in the future” (CoLife) was to develop recommendations on how to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on education and to evaluate digital learning tools used in Latvia. In the first stage of the research, different scenarios were identified after conducting a pilot survey of parents, because parents are one of the main educational agents during the homeschooling process, setting the assessment of how parents were involved in providing education during remote learning, what support they received from schools and what problems they encountered as a research objective for this stage. Based on the data gathered during the pilot study, the next steps of the research were developed for the research project mentioned.

## 2. Research Design and Methodology

The study considered all ethical research standards in accordance with the General Data Protection Requirements (GDPR). The questionnaire was anonymous, and participation in it was completely voluntary. The survey included questions on the demographic information of the respondents, the number of children in the family and the age of the respondent child. Questions were asked about the amount of support children needed, how students performed the tasks assigned to them by teachers and the technological equipment available to families. Parents were not asked to indicate the child’s school or even the exact region where the school is located. After completing all the demographic information, parents were asked to fill in separate questionnaires for each of the children attending the general education institution (forms 1–12), anticipating that the situations for different children at different ages may vary. In cases where parents did not want to complete the questionnaire for each of the children living in the respondent’s family, researchers asked them to complete one for the child whose experience the parents found most informative from a research point of view.

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms, and a link to the survey was disseminated through social networks and contacts of academic members of the university where researchers work. The researchers used the principles of nonprobability sampling, in particular convenience sampling [28], which is assumed to be an appropriate method of sampling for pilot studies and reduces the expenses for conducting the survey [29,30], making a request to the administrations of schools to send them to parents asking for their views on distance learning support. Parents, caregivers or other persons living in the same household as a child and supporting them in their learning were invited to answer the research questions. This was the only formal requirement to take part in the research. Questionnaires were completed between 8 and 28 June 2020. It was the researchers’ conscious choice to discover the parents’ views at the end of the semester, by which time the parents had gradually adapted to remote learning, to avoid extreme answers.

SPSS (IBM Corporation, New York, USA, version 22) software and, in some cases, Microsoft Excel were used for data analysis.

The study has a couple of limitations. Firstly, it was carried out after the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, so the results cannot be fully applied to the current situation. Secondly, the questionnaire was distributed through online communication tools, asking parents to fill out a Google Form that may have affected the data obtained. This type of

survey is easier to use to reach a wide range of people, but at the same time, it has its limitations, as opinions are expressed by people who use digital tools and social media on a daily basis. This creates a situation wherein the opinions of people living in households without technology may be out of the sight of researchers. However, these limitations do not affect the results of the study, as the researchers' task was to understand how parents were involved in the remote learning process and what forms of collaboration schools used to help parents in the accidental homeschooling process.

### 3. Results

In total, 839 questionnaires were completed in the study, but some of them did not provide complete information, so parents' responses for 738 students were used for further analysis. For 661 children, the mother provided answers; for 63 children, the opinions were expressed by their fathers; for 9 children, by their legal representative; and for 5 children, another person close to the child.

The respondents also provided answers about the number of children living with them in the same household, and the results are as follows: in 206 cases, it was one child; in 319 cases, it was two children; in 161 cases, it was three; and in 52 cases, it was answered that 4 or more children lived in the same household. The researchers chose to ask about the number of children living in the same household on a daily basis rather than the number of children in the same family, as the researchers considered that in cases where families are separated, limited contact during a pandemic could affect the ability of a non-household parent to participate in the daily learning process.

Table 1 summarizes the data on the number of students in the classes in which they study and shows that, in general, parents of primary school students were more involved in expressing their views on their children.

**Table 1.** Distribution of students by form.

|         |         | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|---------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid   | form 1  | 85        | 10.1    | 11.5          | 11.5               |
|         | form 2  | 67        | 8.0     | 9.1           | 20.6               |
|         | form 3  | 77        | 9.2     | 10.4          | 31.0               |
|         | form 4  | 84        | 10.0    | 11.4          | 42.4               |
|         | form 5  | 66        | 7.9     | 8.9           | 51.4               |
|         | form 6  | 88        | 10.5    | 11.9          | 63.3               |
|         | form 7  | 81        | 9.7     | 11.0          | 74.3               |
|         | form 8  | 70        | 8.3     | 9.5           | 83.7               |
|         | form 9  | 57        | 6.8     | 7.7           | 91.5               |
|         | form 10 | 38        | 4.5     | 5.1           | 96.6               |
|         | form 11 | 15        | 1.8     | 2.0           | 98.6               |
|         | form 12 | 10        | 1.2     | 1.4           | 100.0              |
|         | Total   | 738       | 88.0    | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing | System  | 101       | 12.0    |               |                    |
| Total   |         | 839       | 100.0   |               |                    |

First of all, the researchers wanted to discover what types of work teachers used during the remote learning process, so parents were asked about these forms of work and asked to evaluate them on a Likert scale, where 1 = all teachers did/used it, 2 = most teachers did/used it, 3 = only some teachers did/used it, 4 = no one used it, and 5 = I do not know. The data obtained are summarized in Table 2 and show that, in most cases, teachers used the opportunities offered by the learning platforms, but tasks such as essays and reports were the least assigned. In a crisis, it is important that learning continues; however, the indicated learning platforms are more suitable for acquiring exact knowledge [31] and are less suitable for acquiring skills such as the ability to express one's opinion, critically analyze information and discuss various issues and views, which are also important in education.

Table 2. Teaching methods used by teachers.

| Form    | Online Lessons<br>(Skype, Zoom,<br>WhatsApp, etc.) | Sending Tasks That Had<br>to Be Printed and<br>Completed after Sending<br>the Completed Work to<br>the Teacher | Assigning tasks<br>Using Online<br>Learning Platforms<br>(Uzdevumi.lv,<br>Fizmix.lv, etc.) | Assigning Essays and<br>Reports (Digital<br>Submission) | Assigning Tasks<br>from Books Where<br>Certain Tasks Had<br>to Be Completed<br>(Printed Version) | Assigning creative<br>Tasks Where the<br>Child Needed to<br>Do Something<br>Independently | Physical<br>Activities | Video Filming<br>about the<br>Assignment |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| form 1  | Mean                                               | 3.29                                                                                                           | 2.87                                                                                       | 3.69                                                    | 2.28                                                                                             | 2.27                                                                                      | 2.74                   | 2.88                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 85<br>.884                                                                                                     | 85<br>.884                                                                                 | 85<br>.951                                              | 85<br>1.053                                                                                      | 85<br>.762                                                                                | 85<br>.693             | 85<br>.944                               |
| form 2  | Mean                                               | 2.99                                                                                                           | 2.64                                                                                       | 3.55                                                    | 2.40                                                                                             | 2.40                                                                                      | 2.75                   | 3.24                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 67<br>.945                                                                                                     | 67<br>.753                                                                                 | 67<br>.974                                              | 67<br>.970                                                                                       | 67<br>.698                                                                                | 67<br>.659             | 67<br>.986                               |
| form 3  | Mean                                               | 2.88                                                                                                           | 2.35                                                                                       | 3.42                                                    | 2.56                                                                                             | 2.36                                                                                      | 2.65                   | 2.96                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 77<br>.959                                                                                                     | 77<br>.757                                                                                 | 77<br>.951                                              | 77<br>1.019                                                                                      | 77<br>.705                                                                                | 77<br>.739             | 77<br>.924                               |
| form 4  | Mean                                               | 2.92                                                                                                           | 2.31                                                                                       | 3.15                                                    | 2.54                                                                                             | 2.57                                                                                      | 2.82                   | 3.20                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 84<br>.764                                                                                                     | 84<br>.711                                                                                 | 84<br>1.035                                             | 84<br>.937                                                                                       | 84<br>.682                                                                                | 84<br>.697             | 84<br>.875                               |
| form 5  | Mean                                               | 2.83                                                                                                           | 2.33                                                                                       | 3.00                                                    | 2.67                                                                                             | 2.55                                                                                      | 2.74                   | 3.11                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 66<br>.852                                                                                                     | 66<br>.810                                                                                 | 66<br>1.008                                             | 66<br>1.043                                                                                      | 66<br>.706                                                                                | 66<br>.640             | 66<br>.862                               |
| form 6  | Mean                                               | 2.74                                                                                                           | 2.23                                                                                       | 3.08                                                    | 2.70                                                                                             | 2.77                                                                                      | 2.92                   | 3.22                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 88<br>.890                                                                                                     | 88<br>.798                                                                                 | 88<br>.834                                              | 88<br>1.063                                                                                      | 88<br>.739                                                                                | 88<br>.776             | 88<br>.809                               |
| form 7  | Mean                                               | 2.84                                                                                                           | 2.40                                                                                       | 3.02                                                    | 3.00                                                                                             | 2.83                                                                                      | 3.20                   | 3.56                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 81<br>.941                                                                                                     | 81<br>.918                                                                                 | 81<br>1.183                                             | 81<br>1.275                                                                                      | 81<br>.985                                                                                | 81<br>.781             | 81<br>.962                               |
| form 8  | Mean                                               | 2.91                                                                                                           | 2.41                                                                                       | 3.03                                                    | 2.96                                                                                             | 3.06                                                                                      | 3.13                   | 3.46                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 70<br>.794                                                                                                     | 70<br>1.042                                                                                | 70<br>1.007                                             | 70<br>1.069                                                                                      | 70<br>.866                                                                                | 70<br>.883             | 70<br>.912                               |
| form 9  | Mean                                               | 2.67                                                                                                           | 2.09                                                                                       | 2.68                                                    | 2.91                                                                                             | 2.77                                                                                      | 2.95                   | 3.35                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 57<br>.893                                                                                                     | 57<br>.635                                                                                 | 57<br>.909                                              | 57<br>1.040                                                                                      | 57<br>.866                                                                                | 57<br>.789             | 57<br>.916                               |
| form 10 | Mean                                               | 2.58                                                                                                           | 2.13                                                                                       | 2.87                                                    | 3.55                                                                                             | 2.84                                                                                      | 3.03                   | 3.37                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 38<br>.858                                                                                                     | 38<br>.777                                                                                 | 38<br>1.070                                             | 38<br>1.245                                                                                      | 38<br>.973                                                                                | 38<br>.822             | 38<br>.942                               |
| form 11 | Mean                                               | 3.13                                                                                                           | 2.67                                                                                       | 2.80                                                    | 3.53                                                                                             | 3.33                                                                                      | 3.27                   | 3.40                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 15<br>1.060                                                                                                    | 15<br>1.113                                                                                | 15<br>1.146                                             | 15<br>1.060                                                                                      | 15<br>1.397                                                                               | 15<br>.961             | 15<br>.910                               |
| form 12 | Mean                                               | 2.40                                                                                                           | 2.80                                                                                       | 2.30                                                    | 2.80                                                                                             | 2.60                                                                                      | 3.30                   | 3.50                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 10<br>.966                                                                                                     | 10<br>1.229                                                                                | 10<br>.675                                              | 10<br>1.135                                                                                      | 10<br>.966                                                                                | 10<br>1.059            | 10<br>1.354                              |
| Total   | Mean                                               | 2.89                                                                                                           | 2.41                                                                                       | 3.16                                                    | 2.72                                                                                             | 2.64                                                                                      | 2.90                   | 3.23                                     |
|         | N<br>SD                                            | 738<br>.900                                                                                                    | 738<br>.858                                                                                | 738<br>1.033                                            | 738<br>1.109                                                                                     | 738<br>.846                                                                               | 738<br>.774            | 738<br>.935                              |



Overall, these results suggest that students were offered remote learning opportunities, but this should be seen in the context of students' digital skills, which indicated that students learned to connect to the Internet, use a computer and printer and use WhatsApp. These results also need to be analyzed in the context of the technological equipment available to students, as many parents indicated that they had purchased computers (55 parents), printers (43), scanners (28), tablets (32), headphones (58) and cameras (38). Several family members shared one device—computers (in 135 cases), tablets (53) and headphones (20)—which generally indicates relatively good technological support but can mean devices are not available all the time. However, the context of the study should be taken into account, as the questionnaire was distributed in a digital environment, and, most likely, opinions were provided by parents who use digital solutions. This questionnaire probably did not reach parents who do not use digital devices themselves, and their opinions on the necessary devices for children's distance learning are therefore probably not represented here.

In the block of questions about the support provided by different people to students during homeschooling, respondents were asked about the approximate amount provided, on the assumption that the child's learning process totals 100%. To evaluate other people's involvement, respondents were asked to mark the approximate percentages of support provided to the child during their distance learning by different family members and teachers. No mathematical accuracy was expected from the respondents as the researchers only wanted to understand the approximate distribution. For example, if the respondent considered that the father was involved with 50% of the support provided, the mother with around 20% and the child themselves with 30% of the assigned work, then it was not necessary to fill in the information for all 100% of support needed. If the respondents thought that the child themselves coped with everything completely, then all the people mentioned in the survey could be marked as having 0% involvement. The obtained data were coded as follows: 1 = 90–100%; 2 = 70–90%; 3 = 50–70%; 4 = 30–50%; 5 = 10–30%; 6 = 1–10%; 7 = did not provide support.

In a summary of the data (see Table 3), it can be seen that most of the support was provided by mothers (mean 3.57), which is in line with the conclusion of other researchers that the greatest burden during this period of homeschooling was on mothers [22,23]. Teachers were identified as the second-largest group of supporters (mean 4.25).

**Table 3.** Support provided to children.

|                              | N   | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|------------------------------|-----|------|----------------|----------|
| Mother                       | 738 | 3.57 | 1.901          | 3.615    |
| Father                       | 738 | 5.25 | 1.696          | 2.878    |
| Other children in the family | 738 | 6.14 | 1.403          | 1.968    |
| Grandparents                 | 738 | 6.26 | 1.454          | 2.115    |
| Teachers                     | 738 | 4.25 | 1.787          | 3.193    |
| Other people                 | 738 | 6.50 | 1.348          | 1.816    |
| Valid N (listwise)           | 738 |      |                |          |

The researchers also analyzed the support provided to students and how much teachers needed it. The obtained data are summarized in Figure 1, which shows that students in younger classes needed more continuous support which was no longer so necessary in older classes, where the answer that *It was necessary in certain situations, but it can't be assumed that it was cumbersome* was chosen most often. However, it is important to note that the indicator for the type of support required—*In some tasks, it was more necessary than we were able to provide*—increased in the 5th–8th forms.

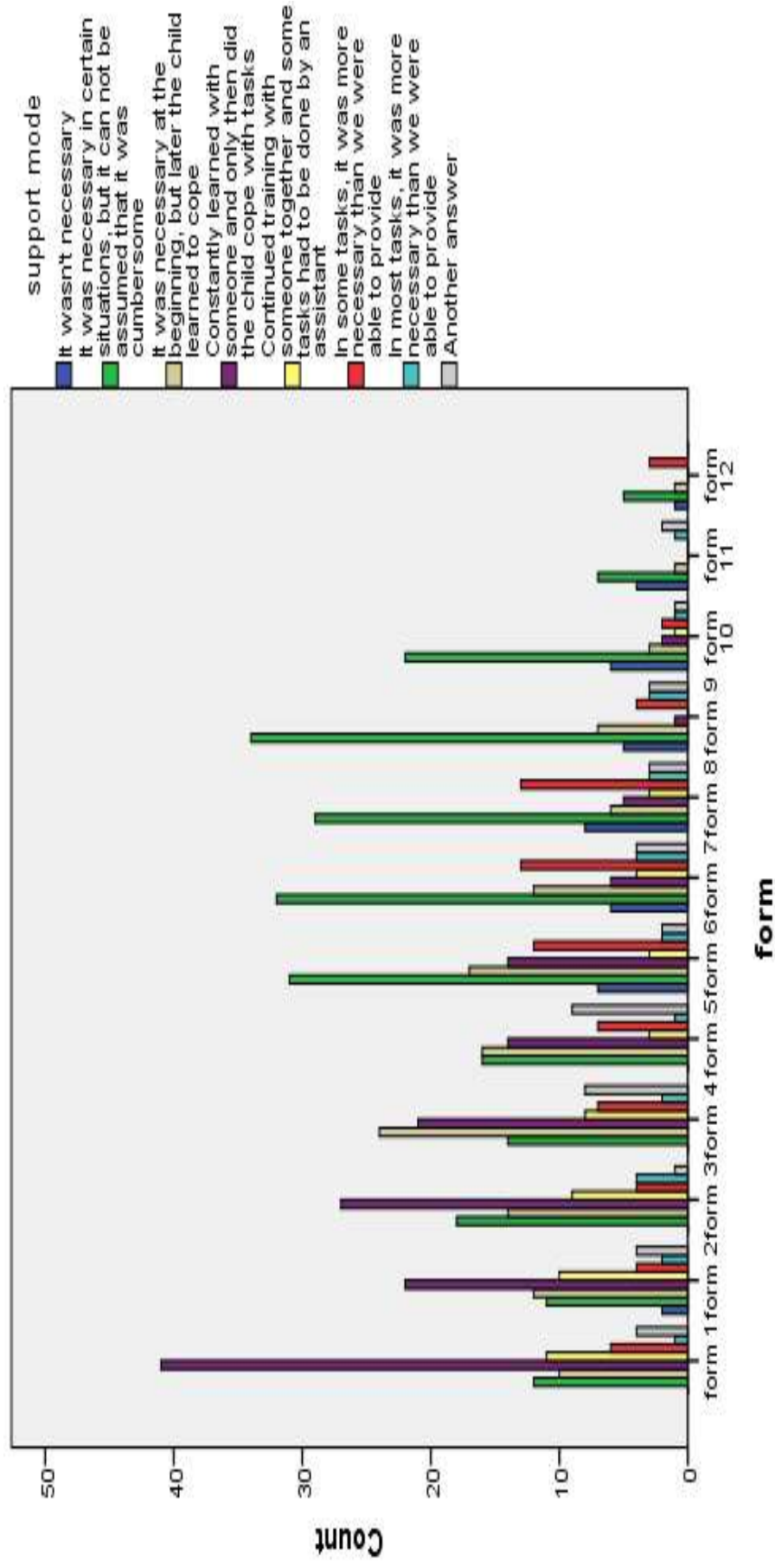


Figure 1. Support needed for children by form.

Analyzing the data distribution by gender (see Figure 2), it can be seen that more continuous support in the learning process was needed for the boys, while gender differences are not visible in the answers *In some tasks, it was more necessary than we were able to provide* and *In most tasks, it was more necessary than we were able to provide*.

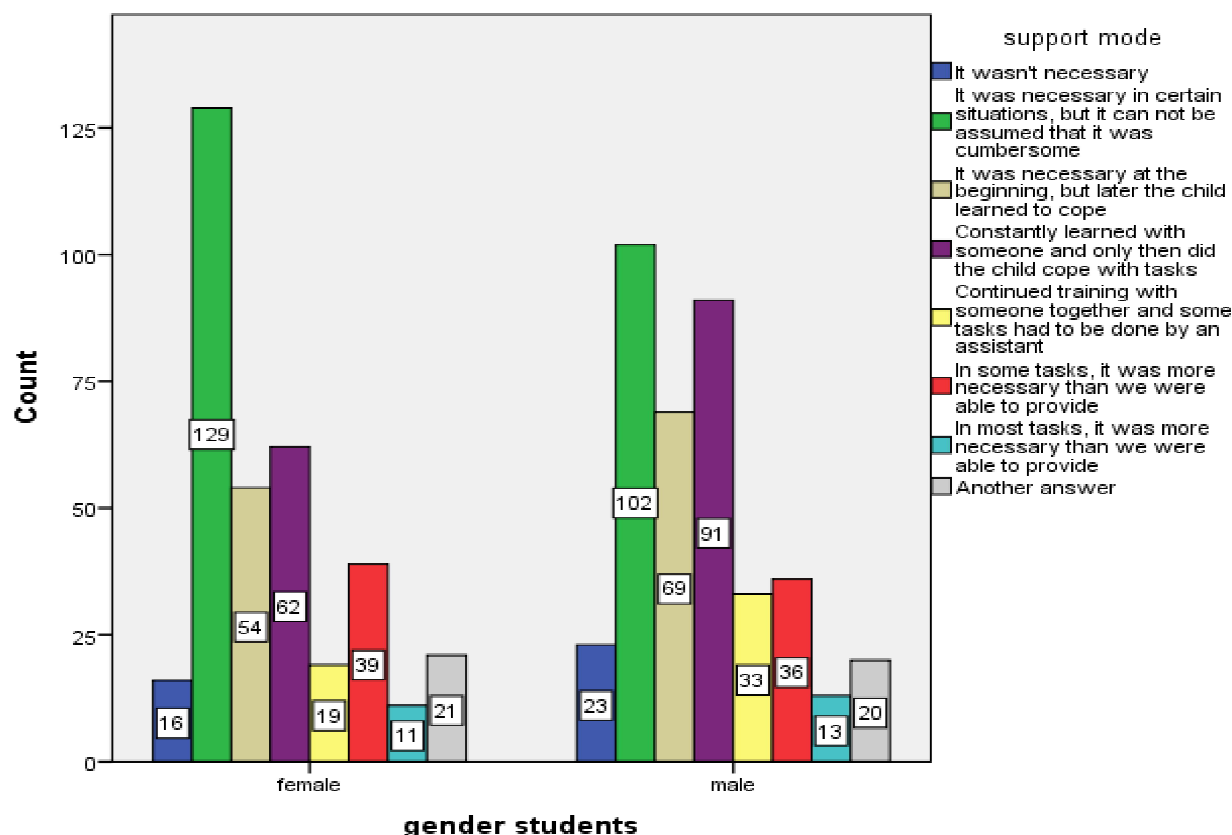


Figure 2. Support needed for children by gender.

Respondents were also asked what information they received from the school during the remote learning process to enable homeschooling. Parents could express their responses indicating that a particular type of support was available and regular (coded as 1), that support was minimal and irregular (coded as 2) or that no such aid was received (coded as 3). The obtained results are summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Support received from schools (N).

|                                                                                            | Yes, Regularly | Minimally and Irregularly | No  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|-----|
| Regular information on how remote learning will be organized                               | 377            | 238                       | 107 |
| Guidelines on the use of digital tools                                                     | 143            | 154                       | 410 |
| Guidelines on the use of conferencing tools (Zoom, Skype, Teams, etc.)                     | 145            | 145                       | 416 |
| Online courses to help parents understand how to use digital tools and learning materials  | 23             | 53                        | 634 |
| Online courses to help students understand how to use digital tools and learning materials | 43             | 84                        | 581 |
| Information on how to support the student during remote learning                           | 138            | 175                       | 395 |

**Table 5.** Support received from schools/forms (mean).

| Mean    |                                                              |                                        |                                                                        |                                                                                           |                                                                                            |                                                                  |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Form    | Regular Information on How Remote Learning Will Be Organized | Guidelines on the Use of Digital Tools | Guidelines on the Use of Conferencing Tools (Zoom, Skype, Teams, etc.) | Online Courses to Help Parents Understand How to Use Digital Tools and Learning Materials | Online Courses to Help Students Understand How to Use Digital Tools and Learning Materials | Information on How to Support the Student during Remote Learning |
| form 1  |                                                              | 2.40                                   | 2.42                                                                   | 2.92                                                                                      | 2.82                                                                                       | 2.48                                                             |
| form 2  | 1.66                                                         | 2.43                                   | 2.48                                                                   | 2.88                                                                                      | 2.84                                                                                       | 2.43                                                             |
| form 3  | 1.63                                                         | 2.47                                   | 2.36                                                                   | 2.95                                                                                      | 2.89                                                                                       | 2.36                                                             |
| form 4  | 1.83                                                         | 2.43                                   | 2.41                                                                   | 2.93                                                                                      | 2.74                                                                                       | 2.49                                                             |
| form 5  | 1.62                                                         | 2.40                                   | 2.43                                                                   | 2.89                                                                                      | 2.78                                                                                       | 2.37                                                             |
| form 6  | 1.46                                                         | 2.29                                   | 2.42                                                                   | 2.82                                                                                      | 2.77                                                                                       | 2.15                                                             |
| form 7  | 1.59                                                         | 2.28                                   | 2.38                                                                   | 2.81                                                                                      | 2.77                                                                                       | 2.24                                                             |
| form 8  | 1.56                                                         | 2.45                                   | 2.35                                                                   | 2.90                                                                                      | 2.77                                                                                       | 2.44                                                             |
| form 9  | 1.55                                                         | 2.28                                   | 2.25                                                                   | 2.69                                                                                      | 2.57                                                                                       | 2.27                                                             |
| form 10 | 1.65                                                         | 2.47                                   | 2.42                                                                   | 2.89                                                                                      | 2.72                                                                                       | 2.56                                                             |
| form 11 | 1.71                                                         | 2.36                                   | 2.29                                                                   | 2.50                                                                                      | 2.21                                                                                       | 2.36                                                             |
| form 12 | 1.33                                                         | 1.78                                   | 1.67                                                                   | 2.56                                                                                      | 2.33                                                                                       | 1.89                                                             |
| Total   | 1.63                                                         | 2.38                                   | 2.38                                                                   | 2.86                                                                                      | 2.76                                                                                       | 2.36                                                             |

Analyzing the results, it can be concluded that most schools provided information on how remote learning would be organized, as 377 parents indicated that they received sufficient information, while 238 parents indicated that they received minimal information. For all other possible forms of support that schools could offer to parents during remote learning, the mean scores are above 2, meaning that only a small proportion of parents indicated that such types of support were received. There was a very low level of support in the form of online courses for both children and their parents on the use of digital learning materials, which shows that parents organized themselves according to their own understanding and provided support to their children to the best of their own ability, which means that there is a predictable gap in pupils' learning outcomes that will depend on parents' ability to provide support to their children in the homeschooling process. These results are very alarming, keeping in mind that most parents do not have specific knowledge on strategies how to support knowledge construction. In Table 5, it can be seen that the information provided by schools was mostly about organizational aspects but not strategies on how to support students (total mean 2.36) which can be used during homeschooling, guidelines for how to use digital tools (total mean 2.38), and the lack of online courses for parents on how to use digital tools and learning materials (total mean 2.86) indicates that parents were left without support during homeschooling. It is understandable that the switch from classroom-based teaching to remote teaching takes a lot of effort from teachers, and they do not have a capacity to prepare all the online lessons for students and at the same time online materials for parents on how to support learning. This leads to the conclusion that there is more support needed from administrative staff of educational institutions and the educational system as whole, who could organize extra pedagogical support for parents to ensure that learning loss is mitigated.

#### 4. Conclusions and Discussion

Analyzing the obtained data, it can be concluded that schools, in trying to ensure the success of remote learning processes, tried to organize these using learning platforms available in Latvia, and parents served as learning agents [13] to provide homeschooling for their children during this period. Overall, this is a good way to organize remote learning, but there are a number of issues that should be taken into account:

- (1) Teachers also tried to organize lessons on online communication platforms (Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams). In general, this trend is to be welcomed, but the availability of technologies should be taken into account as data show that in many families, devices are shared, and this means that there could be occasions when students are not able to join synchronous learning because their siblings have online lessons at that time.

- (2) The learning platforms used in Latvia are more usable in STEM subjects because there are various tasks and tests that require analytical–algorithmic thinking and providing specific answers that are well developed [24,25,31].

However, it must be acknowledged that the choice of such forms of teaching by teachers points to the need to use technology and the Internet and that this form of teaching, although innovative, may pose a risk of social exclusion for students without digital devices to fully connect to their school. This resonates with the conclusion reached by different authors [21,32] that distance learning is better for students whose parents can provide the necessary technology and individual support in the learning process [19,22,33].

At the same time, parents often pointed out that the tasks assigned by teachers were so difficult that their children would not have been able to complete them without parental support, and the need for this support increased in primary school from the 5th grade. Often, parents chose the answer that more support was necessary than they were able to provide. This confirms the desire of parents to support students to strengthen their flourishing [12]. There is an interesting trend when comparing the support needed by students by gender, as it can be seen that boys' parents indicated more frequently that continuous support was needed to enable their child to complete his tasks.

The answers obtained concerning the information parents received from the school about how the remote learning process would be organized, with information about how they could support their children during homeschooling being minimal, allow the conclusion to be drawn that children's learning achievements during this period depend on the possibility for families to provide their children with the required technologies, on the personal understanding of parents about the support necessary for their children's learning and on the possibility for parents to provide such support and parental wellbeing because research has shown that parents also suffer from this unprecedented situation [34,35].

**Author Contributions:** Resources, A.R.; Writing—original draft, L.D.; Writing—review & editing, Z.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** The research was funded by Latvia State Research Program “Covid-19 mitigation” project “Life with COVID-19: Evaluation of overcoming the coronavirus crisis in Latvia and recommendations for societal resilience in the future” No. VPP-COVID-2020/1-0013 (COLife).

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, due to the nature of the research where all the respondents were reached on social media and they voluntary took part in this pilot research to express their opinion.

**Informed Consent Statement:** All the respondents were informed about the use of research data and the statement “By filling this questionnaire you agree that the information provided will be anonymously used in the research. You can stop filling the form if you feel that you do not wish to answer any of questions”.

**Data Availability Statement:** All the data can be found <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ckfqMRzTzhOqIw1tBkGUheqbufOM8T80/view?usp=sharing>.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## Preparing language teachers to teach language online: a look at skills, roles, and responsibilities

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*(Received 15 May 2007; final version received 18 August 2008)*

This paper reviews and critiques an existing skills framework for online language teaching. This critique is followed by an alternative framework for online language teaching skills. This paper also uses a systems view to look at the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in an online learning system. Four major recommendations are provided to help language teacher training programs prepare future language teachers for online language teaching.

**Keywords:** online language teaching; skills; roles; responsibilities; language teacher education; framework

### Introduction

Online language learning has steadily increased in popularity over the last decade with the growth of the internet and the proliferation of computers at home and in educational settings ranging from K-12 to post-secondary (Felix, 2003a; Hubbard & Levy, 2006; Stickler & Hauck, 2006a; White, 2003). White (2003) indicated that there were more than 1300 distance language courses from the 55,000 distant courses registered in 130 countries. She added that the common perceptions of online courses as cost- and time-effective have pushed more providers into the field of online language learning. While the notion of language learning at a distance is not a new phenomenon, rapid developments in communication technology have increased the demand for online language learning that involves connection of learners, both asynchronously and synchronously as well as autonomous learning.

The online context of language learning has prompted the need for new teaching approaches and teaching skills that are different from those used in teaching face-to-face language courses (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). These new teaching skills are crucial for teaching online language courses 'whose subject matter is communication' and especially at the lower level where there is a 'need to focus on the form of interaction as well as the content' (Hampel & Stickler, 2005, p. 312). Additionally, it requires skills that are different from teaching other subjects online. However, there seems to be little concerted effort in this direction as the increase in online language learning has not been matched with an

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increase in teacher training for language teachers beyond the technical and software-specific skills. Moreover, the vast research and best practices for teaching online may not translate well for online language teaching.

Despite a multitude of research-based publications and best practices relating to computer assisted language learning (CALL), including online language learning, there is a dearth of resources on how to prepare teachers for online language teaching and the skills needed for this new teaching environment. To date, no literature review has been published specifically on the skills needed for online language teaching. This literature review is therefore an effort to fill the gap by synthesising the existing but limited literature and providing recommendations for teacher training programmes. However, before proceeding in depth with the synthesis and recommendations, this literature review will attempt to set the stage by presenting: 1) the current state of CALL and language teacher preparation; and 2) the methodology used for the literature search.

It should be noted that for the purpose of this literature review, several references to CALL will be included to frame the general discussion since online language learning is a subset of this area and very little has been published specifically on online language learning. In most cases, the references to CALL used in this review deal with the use of technology over the internet, which relates closely to the online language learning environment.

### **Current state of CALL and language teacher education**

In a 2007 keynote address at a leading CALL conference, Hubbard (2008) shared that CALL had increased its presence in second and foreign language teaching. He also asserted that language teachers are 'pivotal players ... [for] the future of CALL [since] they select the tools to support their teaching and determine what CALL applications language learners are exposed to and how learners use them' (p. 176).

Presently, a common approach to CALL in current language teacher education programmes is to concentrate on the hardware and software issues rather than the pedagogy. According to Kessler (2006), much of instructional technology preparation in teacher training programmes focuses on digital literacy or software specific orientation. These skills help teachers to use technology but do not prepare them to use technology for language teaching. While there is a growing amount of literature that provides an overview of CALL to teacher candidates, Hubbard (2008) reported that there is evidence of language teachers graduating with little or no knowledge of the use of technology in language teaching. Similarly, Abras and Sunshine (2008) and Jones and Youngs (2006, p. 267) pointed out that teacher preparation in the United States for online, distance or hybrid language courses is lacking. Abras and Sunshine also highlighted the inconsistencies in good practices and the lack of benchmarks for teacher training technology standards as concerns for the field of language teacher education.

Meanwhile, Hubbard and Levy (2006) were concerned that language teachers would be at a disadvantage if they are not adequately trained for CALL. As Hubbard (2007) pointed out, 39% of the positions listed on 29 October 2005 on a TESOL career centre site mentioned CALL or technology skills as required or desirable. The number jumped to 60% based on listed positions on the same site five months later on 22 March 2006 (Kessler, 2006). Clearly, CALL preparation is needed in language teacher education programmes.

In a survey through CALL-related listservs, Kessler (2006) found that graduates of TESOL programmes expressed general dissatisfaction with their formal CALL

preparation. Of the 240 respondents 51% said their CALL training was 'extremely ineffective' and 25% found it 'somewhat ineffective'. Hubbard (2008) attributed the lack of formal CALL training to reasons including limited CALL teacher educators, lack of established methodology, insufficient infrastructure, standards, and time, as well as unsupportive faculty who believed that technology training was an institutional responsibility. Even though many teacher trainers have done work independently in the area of CALL (Hubbard & Levy, 2006), Kessler (2006, p. 23) claimed that 'formal language teacher preparation programmes have largely neglected to equip their graduates with the related knowledge and skills they need to enter today's technologically advanced language classroom'. In fact, only a shocking eight of 50 North American TESOL graduate programmes (as indicated on their websites in 2004) had any mention of a CALL component in their coursework and only three of these had a CALL course (Kessler, 2005). Kessler (2006) added that most teachers gained their CALL knowledge from informal or self-study rather than instruction.

The assumption that a teacher who is good at teaching in a face-to-face class can easily jump in and teach in this new medium is a common myth (Davis & Rose, 2007; Wood, 2005). Easton's (2003) study of skills needed by distance learning instructors showed the need for the online instructor to have a paradigm shift in perceptions of instructional time and space, virtual management techniques and ways of engaging students through virtual communications in addition to the communication skills already required for general effective classroom teaching. Additionally, Hampel and Stickler (2005) noted that online language teachers not only needed different skills from those of traditional language teachers in face-to-face classrooms but also different skills from online teachers of other subjects. The lack of non-verbal clues in audio conferencing, for example, can be very challenging for online language teachers. Clearly, CALL teacher preparation needs to improve if we want the new generation of language teachers to be prepared for teaching in online environments. This literature review attempts to provide recommended steps for language teacher education programmes based on identified skills needed for online language teaching. The next section outlines the methodology used to identify relevant and quality resources for the identification of such skills.

### **Literature search methodology**

The areas of CALL, technology for language learning, and language teacher education have been greatly researched. However, research on effective preparation for online language teachers is scarce. Due to the limited publication pertinent to the topic of teacher education and online language teaching, the search for relevant literature became an exploration into three major disciplines: CALL, online/distance education and teacher education. Using a methodology resembling a qualitative data analysis, this literature search involved iterative cycles of data collection, analysis and synthesis. Key publications dealing closely with the topic of this literature review (Chapelle & Hegelheimer, 2004; Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Stickler & Hauck, 2006a; Jones & Youngs, 2006) were used as the starting point. These articles were used to identify important skills needed for online language teaching. Additionally, relevant books (Felix, 2003b; Hubbard & Levy, 2006) and special publication issues (CALICO Monograph Series (2008), Vol. 7; *CALICO Journal* (2006) 23(3); *Language Learning & Technology* (2003), 7(3) (Glew, 2003) were identified in the first round to provide a general insight into this topic.

In the second round of review, critiques and ideas gleaned from prominent CALL specialists through related books and articles were also used to support and elaborate on

the list of skills identified from the first round of review as there were limited research-based articles related to teacher training and online language learning. Searches for articles (print and online) selected and reviewed for this cycle were conducted using the ERIC online data base with various combinations of keywords (keywords: CALL, teacher education, distance education, online education, language learning, literature review) without the year restriction as well as a methodical manual search of individual issues in leading and reputable journals (e.g. *CALICO Journal*, *CALL Journal*, *Language Learning & Technology*). Because instructional technology is constantly evolving, the manual search of articles was limited to those published between 2000 and early 2008 to ensure that the most relevant issues in teaching CALL were covered. Additional relevant references gathered from the key publications from the first cycle were also reviewed in this round.

Although literature in the general area of online teaching and CALL is widely available, there are very limited resources specifically for the preparation of language teachers for online language teaching. This literature review is an attempt to address the scarcity of resources in the mentioned area by synthesising research and thought pieces from CALL, online and distance education and teacher education. This paper now presents its main discussion starting with a review of an online language teaching skills pyramid and a critique of the framework.

### **Skills for online language teaching**

Chapelle and Hegelheimer (2004) stressed the need to clarify the key competences of language teachers in the twenty-first century to 'effectively and critically engage in technology-related teaching issues ... within a world that is decisively supported and interconnected by technology' (p. 300). Clarification of key competences is crucial for online language teacher training, since teaching language online requires skills that differ from traditional language teaching as well as teaching other subjects online. In this section, this literature review will look at the type of skills for online language teaching. In the first part, Hampel and Stickler's (2005) paper as introduced earlier provides a framework to discuss the types of skills needed for online language teaching. In the second part, I will provide a critique of the pyramid and recommend a modified framework for online language teaching skills. Since research from the European context will be used to inform this literature review, the term 'tutors' will be used interchangeably with the United States (US) equivalent, 'teachers' or 'instructors'.

### ***Types of skills***

In this sub-section, Hampel and Stickler's (2005) paper is used to frame the discussion of skills needed for online language teaching, since their paper was the first clear effort on the topic of teacher training for online language learning. Because few research-based articles relating to the training of online language teachers were located, non research-based literature was also used to provide supporting evidence for the skills discussed in this section.

According to Hampel and Stickler (2005), teaching language online requires skills that are different from those used to teach language in face-to-face classrooms. It is also different from teaching other subjects online. It requires more than just the knowledge of 'which buttons to press in order to send an email or which HTML coding is required to insert an image on a web page' (Bennett & Marsh, 2002, p. 14). Bennett and Marsh identified two important pieces of knowledge beyond the technical level: (a) to 'identify the

significant difference and similarities between face-to-face and online learning and teaching contexts,' and (b) to 'identify strategies and techniques to facilitate online learning and help students exploit the advantages in relation to both independent and collaborative learning' (p. 16). Besides that, community building skills to encourage socialisation, active participation and collaboration are equally important for online teaching (Jones & Youngs, 2006; Hampel & Stickler, 2005; McLoughlin & Oliver, 1999).

Based on their years of teaching languages synchronously in an online environment and experience in the training of online tutors, Hampel and Stickler (2005) attempted to identify the key competences of an online language tutor. They presented a pyramid of skills (Figure 1) with seven key competences ranging from lower level skills (e.g. basic ICT competence, specific technical and software competence and awareness of constraints and possibilities) to higher level skills (e.g. online socialisation, facilitation of communicative competence as well as creativity, choice and selection). They said that the online language teaching skills needed to 'build on one another in a kind of pyramid, from the most general skills forming a fairly broad base to an apex of individual and personal styles' (p. 316).

The first level of skills for an online tutor relates to technological skills. This includes the ability to deal with basic equipment such as a keyboard, mouse, soundcards, and headsets, as well as familiarity with common problems with ISP connections, firewall, internet browsers, plug-ins, etc. Chapelle and Hegelheimer (2004) added that the ability to troubleshoot basic browser problems was also important since most information is accessed through a browser interface. They advocated training through computer methods courses. The competence to use networked computers and the familiarity with basic applications are skills that have become prerequisites for effective online language teaching (Hampel & Sticker, 2005) and the general twenty-first century language teacher (Chapelle & Hegelheimer, 2004). These skills are often taken for granted and commonly left to the

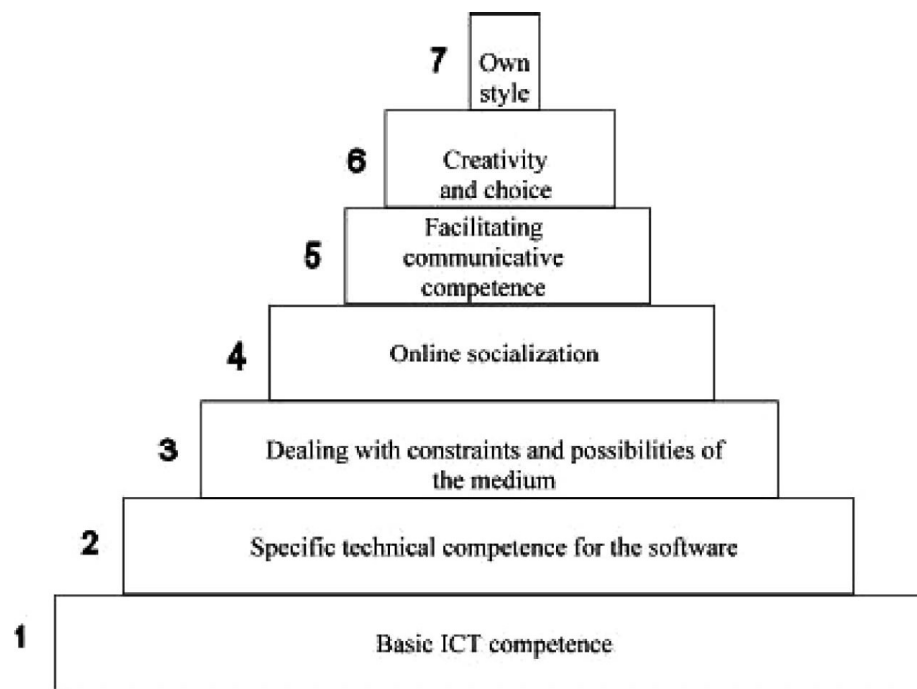


Figure 1. Skills pyramid (Hampel & Stickler, 2005, p. 317).

teachers to learn on their own, especially since there is a limited amount of time to cover everything else.

The second level of skill is to use specific software applications to teach languages online. These applications may include commercial software purchased by the institution (e.g. webCT, Wimba, or Elluminate) and/or freeware and open source (e.g. Yahoo Messenger, Skype or Moodle). Additionally, online teachers need to know a range of applications, from course management software (CMS) to applications that specifically facilitate CALL activities and provide students with a range of communication opportunities. Chapelle and Hegelheimer (2004) specifically noted the importance of knowing how to use communication tools such as 'chat rooms, bulletin boards, e-mail, and electronic mailing lists' to support the learners' communicative competence through computer-mediated technologies in the area of language learning (p. 308). Additionally, the latest technologies have made it easier and more affordable for teaching languages via audio and video conferencing. Skype and Yahoo Messenger, for example, offer free audio-video conferencing, while webcams and headsets with microphones are cheap and can be easily purchased online or in stores.

However, knowing how to use the specific software applications is not enough. The third level of skills requires the online language teacher to understand the affordances and constraints of the specific applications. For instance, free software is plentiful but each has its strengths and drawbacks. ICQ, an example of free synchronous chat software, can be downloaded in different languages such as Arabic, Swedish, Dutch, French, Chinese and Spanish (Compton, 2004). This is an extremely useful communication tool for online language learning since it supports different language scripts. However, Compton warned practitioners that their students may receive unsolicited messages and chat invitations from other ICQ users even though they are not on the student's list, because ICQ is an open chat channel. These unsolicited messages and invitations may interrupt the task and could possibly pose as safety threats, especially for younger learners. Teachers, however, can avoid them by having their students switch to the 'invisible mode' after they have established connections with their assigned learning partners.

The fourth level of skills relate to online socialisation. The quality of interpersonal interaction relies on the sense of community that has been established (Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Salmon, 2003). A sense of trust is particularly relevant in beginners' language courses because learners often feel very insecure and unable to express themselves. Hampel and Stickler (2005) believed that extra care should be taken to foster positive online socialisation and community so learners will not be afraid to be active participants. They added that socialisation and community building in an online environment require skills that are very different from face-to-face classroom, so that even 'the most jovial and well-liked tutor of face-to-face courses' cannot automatically become a successful online teacher (p. 318). Additionally, Davis and Rose (2007) warned that miscommunication in an online community can lead to tension. They stated that online teachers should have good communication skills, and that these are even more critical for online environments due to the lack of visual cues. Jones and Youngs (2006) added that online teachers also need to know how to stimulate active participation and collaboration because they can facilitate online socialisation and even help to maintain students' interest in the subject matter and learning.

The literature contains a number of studies that support the importance of community in online language learning. A study on networked collaboration between non-native speakers (NNSs) of Spanish and native speakers (NSs) of Spanish in the US by Lee (2004) showed that language proficiency affected the quality of online negotiations and students'



motivation. The goal of the collaboration was to provide the NNSs with opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom, while the NSs gained experience with online technologies as part of their course requirements. No effort was made to establish community between these two groups of learners prior to their task-based interactions. Survey results of the NNSs learners showed that the NNSs experienced anxiety and discomfort with the online experience. Additionally, NNSs learners expressed frustration in scheduling attempts and they believed that the NSs did not benefit from their collaborative experiences and may have felt frustrated or bored. These negative experiences could be minimised if the sense of community had been established prior to the task-based interactions. In particular, the sense of community and trust might have helped to alleviate the NNSs' concerns of making mistakes if they did not feel judged or feel they were holding up the online conversation, which in turn could have resulted in a more positive interpersonal interaction with high level interactions.

The fifth level of skills requires the online instructor to be an effective facilitator of communicative competence. This skill builds upon the successful socialisation of students and the promotion of social cohesion: Hampel and Stickler (2005) noted that meaningful communicative interaction 'would hardly take place in a classroom without social cohesion and would certainly not provide successful practice opportunities for communicative encounters' (p. 318). They asserted that in communicative language teaching, interaction between participants is crucial and can be achieved in an online course through task design.

A study of a telecollaborative project between students of English in Germany and students of German in Australia by O'Dowd and Ritter (2006) provides evidence of the need to develop social cohesion and importance of task design. An intended topic of comparison of media coverage of a global event was misinterpreted as a debate about religion and resulted in superficial exchanges because a strong sense of community had not been established. Results showed that the task design and lack of social cohesion prevented the students from meaningful interactions. One student commented in his final evaluation:

Not everyone is interested in the Pope and/or religion. So our messages about this were very short and superficial ... This disturbed the rather personal beginning of the exchange. It is definitely not a good choice as the second task for people who barely know each other. (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006, p. 636)

The researchers concluded that the 'task design, ... [and] the students' psychobiographical backgrounds led to interaction failures' (p. 637).

Creativity and choice are the sixth level of skills for online language tutors. Chapelle and Hegelheimer (2004) noted that 'searching, evaluating and repurposing of materials' are important web literacy skills that all twenty-first century teachers should have since the world wide web provides such a wide range of resources for teaching. For an online tutor, these skills are necessary to aid the selection of 'good, authentic language learning materials ... and [creativity in] designing online activities with the communicative principles in mind' (Hampel & Stickler, 2005, p. 319). Creativity is not only limited to the design of the materials but also with finding new uses for online tools. For example, most text and voice chat freeware applications were originally offered as social tools but they can be used to mediate communicative language activities. Hampel and Stickler also shared an example of creativity where a 'yes' button in Lyceum, the institution's synchronous audio-graphic conferencing system, was originally intended for voting but later used as a signal of consent to a verbal statement.



In the event of working with pre-prepared materials, it is necessary to have skills to select, implement and adapt given tasks for successful online language teaching in addition to the critical understanding of affordances and constraints of the technologies and mediums of communication and interaction. Davis and Rose (2007, p. 9) added that ‘an understanding of how and when to provide student support, how and when to provide opportunities for interaction, the appropriate selection and use of resources, and the development of resources to serve specific instructional purposes’ are necessary skills for online teaching.

The seventh and highest level of skills for online language teaching includes the ability to develop a ‘personal teaching style, using the media and materials to their best advantage, forming a rapport with [the] students and using the resources creatively to promote active and communicative language learning’ (Hampel & Stickler, 2005, p. 319). In essence, this level of skills requires the online tutor to master all of the previous levels of skills listed in the pyramid. These skills do not come naturally and may require tutors with face-to-face teaching experiences to re-discover their teaching styles. Hampel and Stickler noted that inexperienced tutors may find the lack of body language restrictive at first, but an increase familiarity and confidence with lower level skills can help them find new teaching styles. They also added that some problems encountered during online teaching may be similar or parallel to those in face-to-face classes but the solutions may be different. Thus, the online tutors have to develop new teaching styles that will be suitable to the medium of instruction.

### *Critique of Hampel and Stickler’s skills pyramid*

In this sub-section, I will address the limitations of Hampel and Stickler’s (2005) skills pyramid and use them to propose a modified framework in the next section.

Hampel and Stickler (2005) presented their online teaching skills in a pyramid form to indicate that the skills ‘build on one another, from the most general skills forming a fairly broad base to an apex of individual and personal styles’ (p. 316). They added that the lower level skills have to be achieved before the higher level skills can come to fruition. In doing so, there is an implication that these skills have to be developed sequentially. I would argue that some of these skills can be developed concurrently and do not necessarily have to come in the order implied in the pyramid. For instance, acquiring specific technical competence and dealing with constraints and possibilities of the medium are both technology related issues. An online language tutor who is learning new software can also learn to deal with the constraints and possibilities at the same time. It may even be more beneficial to develop those skills together since all software applications have strengths and weaknesses and not all software is intended for online language learning.

Meanwhile, online socialisation and facilitation of communicative competence are both pedagogical issues that can be dealt with simultaneously or in any order, since they relate to strategies of teaching. Online socialisation is important because it helps to create a sense of community, which in turn helps to facilitate online interaction. Therefore, an online language tutor should learn strategies that will facilitate online socialisation and promote interaction at the same time so that learners can develop their communicative competence.

L2 acquisition may not necessarily require online socialisation. Intrapersonal interactions that focus on the learner’s mind and interpersonal interactions between learner and content (Chapelle, 2005) do not require any online socialisation with other learners or the tutor. Thus, the online language tutor should know how to facilitate L2 acquisition rather

than online socialisation. In this case, it is important for the online language tutor to focus on the curriculum, tasks and the delivery method rather than the online community.

Besides the limitation implied in the sequencing, the pyramid does not provide any indication of when an online language tutor is ready to teach. A look at the pyramid suggests that a tutor who has developed his/her own style of teaching has achieved the highest level of skills but this may not necessarily be the same level as that at which a tutor is ready or allowed to teach. In spite of this, there are no guidelines from the pyramid to show when that should happen.

Hampel and Stickler (2005) stated that 'online language teachers require different skills compared to online teachers of other subjects' (p. 312). However, only one skill (i.e. facilitating communicative competence) is specific to online language learning. In general, the pyramid provides a framework that appears to be applicable to any online teaching context. Other important skills and competences of online language teaching, such as application of language learning theories, online language assessment and task evaluation, are not included. Knowledge of language learning theories, assessment and task evaluations are not only important for any language courses, they are also different for an online context. Therefore, it is crucial that a framework for online language teaching should address these skills.

This section began with a review of Hamel and Stickler's (2005) pyramid of skills for online language teaching and continued with a review of its limitations. In the following section, an alternate framework for online language teaching skills will be provided based on synthesis of literature including the mentioned pyramid of skills.

### **A proposed framework for online language teaching skills**

In this section, I propose a framework for online language teaching skills that is intended to guide language teacher training programmes. This framework is built based on synthesis of literature in CALL and teacher education. It attempts to address the limitations in Hampel and Stickler's (2005) skills pyramid. The framework focuses solely on the skills of an online language teacher and excludes any other roles played by the learning institution, student services or instructional technology services.

Abras and Sunshine (2008) called for technology related benchmarks in teacher training, including course design, content, pedagogy and technology as well as methodology and theory of second language learning. Figure 2 shows the proposed framework for online language teaching skills that attempts to address the suggested benchmarks. As indicated in the framework, there are three major sets of online language teaching: a) technology in online language teaching; b) pedagogy of online language teaching; and c) evaluation of online language teaching. The first set, technological skills, relate to knowledge and ability to handle hardware and software issues. Next, the pedagogical skills refer to knowledge and ability to conduct and facilitate teaching and learning activities. Lastly, the evaluative skills refer to the analytical ability to assess the tasks and overall course and make necessary modifications to ensure language learning objectives are met.

Each of these sets has different skills that are essential for online language teaching. These skills are also organised into three levels of expertise: novice, proficient and expert. These levels are not absolute but rather a continuum of expertise. The skills within each level can be developed individually or simultaneously but they are necessary in order to proceed to the next level of expertise. For instance, any skills listed in any of the three sets (technology, pedagogy and evaluation) under the novice level can be developed in any order and combinations. However, these skills have to be developed before they can

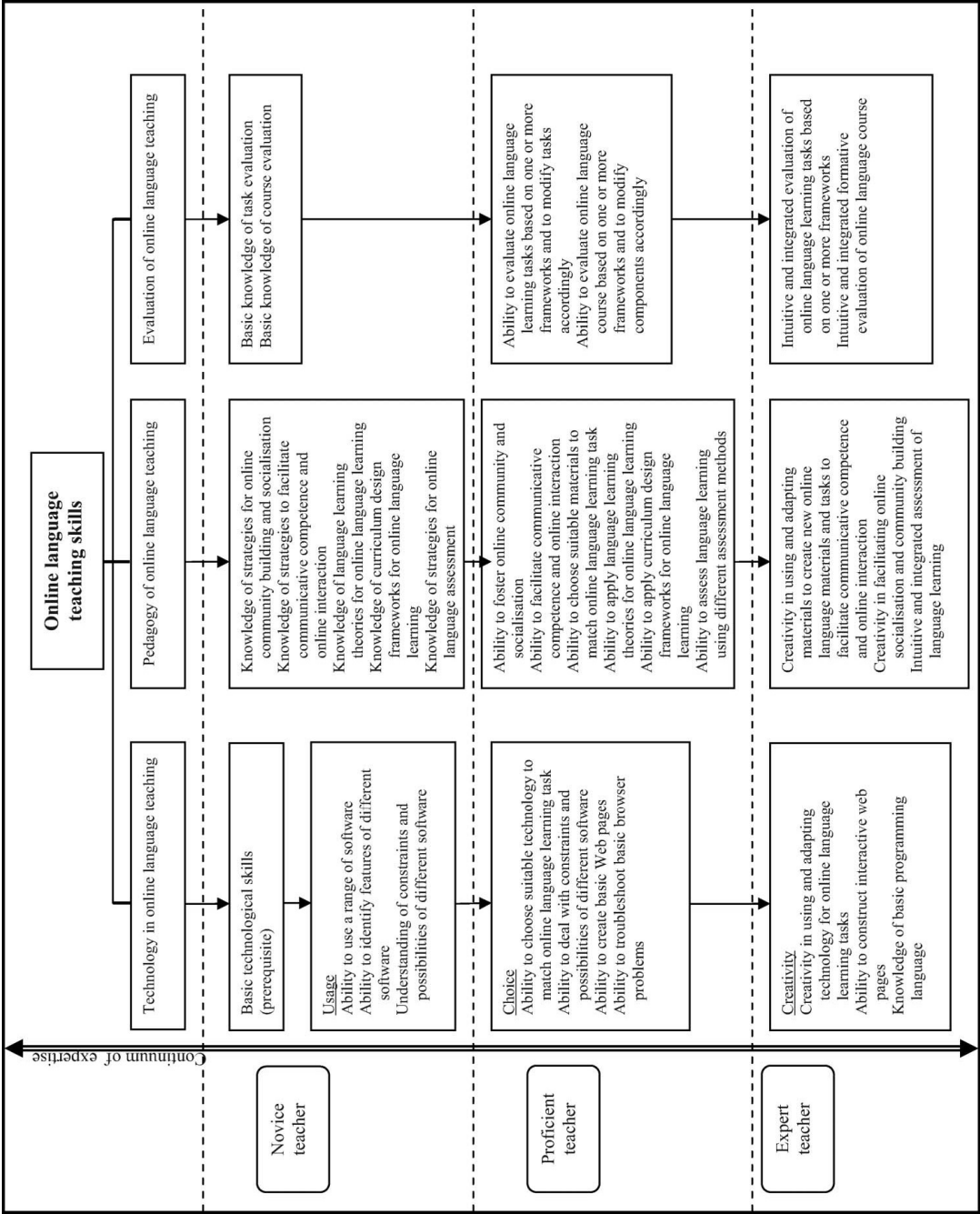


Figure 2. Proposed framework for online language teaching skills.

proceed to the next level of skills listed at the proficient level. Additionally, in order to limit the scope of this literature review, this framework only lists a range of key skills that should be given primary focus but acknowledges that there may be other skills that can be added to the framework.

### *Technological skills*

Technological skills in this subsection are divided into three levels of expertise: novice, proficient and expert. At each of the levels, there is a main emphasis underlying the technological skills. The emphasis at the novice level is for the teacher to become a proficient user of technology. Familiarity with a range of technology can then help to increase the teacher's confidence in using the technology for teaching purposes. At the proficient level, the emphasis is on being an effective judge of different technologies so the teacher can choose the best technology given a certain set of conditions. This is similar to the sixth level skill (choice) listed in Figure 1. Figure 1 also lists creativity at the sixth level. In this proposed framework, creativity is separated from choice and reserved for the expert teacher who has become confident and successful at using, choosing and modifying relevant technologies for online language learning.

At the first level, the basic technological skills as defined by Hampel and Stickler (2005) are necessary prerequisites for any novice teachers. This includes the ability to turn on a computer, use a mouse and basic knowledge of simple applications, e.g. word processing and the internet. Based on these basic skills, a novice online language teacher should proceed to be a proficient user of various technologies that could be used for online language learning. Since communicative competence is an important facet of language learning, the novice teacher should also learn about the differences between asynchronous and synchronous technologies and be comfortable in using computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies which include text, audio, and video conferencing. Additionally, a novice teacher should also be familiar with CMS (e.g. Blackboard, webCT and Moodle), and able to navigate through one or more systems. While learning to use different software, the novice teacher should be able to identify and compare features in similar software (e.g. Yahoo Messenger versus Skype or webCT versus Moodle).

At the next level of expertise, a proficient teacher can build upon his/her knowledge as a technology user and be good at making choices. This includes familiarity with different software and having the ability to carefully select suitable technology to match the online language tasks. Also, the proficient teacher can find available software (freeware and commercial software) and make an informed decision based on the pros and cons. Complementary to this skill is the ability to deal with the limitations of the chosen software and provide solutions to overcome the limitations. Also, the proficient teacher is capable of drawing on the software's existing features to facilitate the language learning process including content delivery, online interactions and course management.

Chapelle and Hegelheimer (2004) stated that all twenty-first century language teachers should be able to troubleshoot basic browser problems since almost all information will be accessed through a browser interface. They added that these teachers should also have expertise ranging from 'creating basic web pages [using WYSIWYG (What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get) programmes] on one end of the continuum to programming an online course on the other end' (p. 307). A proficient online language teacher should have some ability to troubleshoot basic browser programmes as recommended by Chapelle and Hegelheimer. Examples of these skills would include recognition of basic extensions (e.g. .doc, .png, .exe, .jpeg and .mov) and being able to identify, download and install

appropriate browser plug-ins. As for web pages, a proficient teacher should at least be able to design basic web pages using WYSIWYG programmes as well as insert hyperlinks and links to media files.

Next on the expertise continuum, an expert teacher is able to creatively use and adapt existing technologies for online language learning tasks. Since many software applications were not originally created for online language learning, the expert teacher has to be creative in using the existing features to provide online interactions. For instance, Second Life, a 3D virtual world, was originally intended for social networking and fantasy gaming. Users can connect with other 'residents' of this virtual world through voice and text chat. However, an expert teacher would be able to explore the use of Second Life for role-playing to provide learners with opportunities for practicing language. Examples of creativity in such areas by expert teachers are evident through the creation of and participation in Second Life English (<http://www.secondlifeenglish.com/news.php>). In addition, the expert teacher is able to construct dynamic and interactive web pages that can enhance online language learning activities as well as the delivery of content. They may also be able to create basic applications using programming knowledge.

### *Pedagogical skills*

Similar to the technological skills, there is also an underlying emphasis for each level of pedagogical skills. At the novice level, the emphasis is for the teacher to acquire adequate information or knowledge. At the proficient level, the emphasis is on application of the knowledge that has been acquired at the novice level, while the emphasis at the expert level is on creativity with knowledge and application.

Since many online language courses involve more than one student, there is a need for online community building and socialisation. The novice teacher should therefore be aware of their importance and different strategies to promote them. Also, the novice teacher should be knowledgeable about different ways to facilitate communicative competence and online interaction. Besides that, the teacher should also know different language learning theories and strategies for online language assessment. Lyddon and Sydorenko (2008) for instance, presented a range of assessment tools ranging from computer-adaptive tests to CMC assessments for the four basic communication skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) that would be useful for online language learning assessment.

In addition to language learning theories and online language assessment strategies, knowledge of online language learning curriculum design is also important, since learning language online is different from learning language in a traditional face-to-face setting. Lai, Zhao, and Li (2008) for example, proposed some design principles for distance foreign language environments that deal with the course communication component and the course structure component. Table 1 shows their proposed framework.

At the proficient level, the teacher should be able to choose suitable materials and tasks for online language learning. The proficient teacher is also able to adapt one or more language learning theories and course design frameworks for the online language learning context, and select materials and tasks accordingly. Additionally, the teacher is also able to assess language learning using a range of assessment methods.

Once a teacher has gained confidence in online language teaching and exposure to a range of tasks, activities, and materials, they may become more creative in using and adapting materials and tasks for online language learning purposes. Creativity may also be expressed in ingenious ways to facilitate online socialisation and community building. At



Table 1. Design principles for distance foreign language environments (Lai, Zhao, &amp; Li, 2008, p. 90).

| Components           | Principles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Course communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide many opportunities for various forms of interaction with different interlocutors in both written and oral modes</li> <li>● Facilitate high-quality interactions with multiple opportunities for negotiation of meaning and cultural understanding</li> <li>● Provide clear instructions, course expectations, and technical support</li> <li>● Provide quality feedback in a timely manner and encourage peer feedback</li> <li>● Mediate interaction through various communication media and use different media for different interaction purposes</li> </ul> |
| Course structure     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Apply task-based instruction to foster a learner-centred learning environment</li> <li>● Strive for focus on form and emergent, learner-based linguistic 'instruction'</li> <li>● Vary the course structure to cater to various learning needs and styles</li> <li>● Conduct constant formative assessment to construct individualised learning support</li> <li>● Incorporate activities that help learners to strengthen their ability to manage their learning</li> <li>● Encourage learners to co-construct class resources and the learning environment</li> </ul> |

this point, a personal style of teaching as indicated in the seventh (highest) level in Figure 1 would emerge. The expert teacher is also more intuitive with formative assessment, i.e. able to identify learners' progress easily based on learners' language output, and able to integrate several ways of language assessments through formative and summative methods. (See Lyddon & Sydorenko, 2008 for ideas on formative and summative online language assessment.)

### *Evaluation skills*

A creative teacher may not necessarily be successful at teaching if the learning tasks do not lead to the desired outcomes. Moreover, as pointed out by Chapelle (2001), teachers need to know what kind of CALL tasks may be beneficial. Therefore, knowledge of CALL and/or online language learning tasks, software and course evaluation are necessary for online language teachers so that appropriate modifications can be made.

At the novice level, the teacher should have knowledge of different types of evaluation. For example, Chapelle (2001) identified three levels of analysis (software, task and learner's performance) to improve CALL evaluation. Firstly, aspects to focus on (but not limited to) software use include its impact on control, interactivity and feedback. Secondly, the task should be evaluated based on its impact on learners' online interactions and opportunities for negotiation of meaning. Thirdly, the learners' performance can be used to evaluate if desired learning outcomes are met through the online tasks.

Knowledge of one or more suitable evaluation frameworks (e.g. Chapelle, 2001) is also important for evaluating the effectiveness of the CALL learning activities. For example, Chapelle also provided a framework to evaluate CALL task appropriateness (Table 2) that can be adapted for online language learning tasks. Chapelle's framework uses six criteria to evaluate CALL task appropriateness: language learning potential, meaning focus, learner fit, authenticity, positive impact and practicality. While this framework was



Table 2. Criteria for CALL task appropriateness (Chapelle, 2001, p. 55).

|                             |                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Language learning potential | The degree of opportunity present for beneficial focus on form                                                                         |
| Meaning focus               | The extent to which learners' attention is directed toward the meaning of the language                                                 |
| Learner fit                 | The amount of opportunity for engagement with language under appropriate conditions given learner characteristics                      |
| Authenticity                | The degree of correspondence between the learning activity and target language activities of interest to learners out of the classroom |
| Positive impact             | The positive effects of the CALL activity on those who participate in it                                                               |
| Practicality                | The adequacy of resources to support the use of the CALL activity                                                                      |

intended to evaluate CALL tasks, it can be adapted to evaluate online language learning tasks. Additionally, it can help to inform the task design process. Besides knowledge about task and software evaluation, the novice teacher should also know different ways to evaluate the course. For example, knowing the difference between formative and summative evaluation and the functions of these evaluations are important for any course evaluation.

Based on the knowledge acquired at the novice level, the proficient teacher can learn to apply the different frameworks and use various strategies for task, software, and course evaluations. If evidence from the evaluations show that the learning outcome is not met, the proficient teacher is able to rely on his/her pedagogical and technological skills to make the necessary modifications.

While the proficient teacher is capable of using one or more frameworks to evaluate the three areas (task, software and course) on their impact on learning outcomes, the expert teacher is able to conduct the evaluation using integrative methods, i.e. combining several ways of evaluation. Moreover, the expert teacher is more insightful than the proficient teacher and is able to quickly identify the impact on learning outcomes based on their extensive knowledge of evaluative frameworks. Evaluation may even become a subconscious effort.

This proposed framework in this section attempts to address the limitations in Hampel and Stickler's (2005) skills pyramid. This alternate framework divides online language teaching skills into three categories (technology, pedagogy, and evaluation) and describes the different skills at three levels of expertise (novice, proficient and expert). This framework will be used to guide the recommendations for teacher education in a later section. The following section will review the different roles and responsibilities of an online teacher using a systems view.

### **Role and responsibilities of an online language teacher and other stakeholders: a systems view**

This section reviews the role and responsibilities of an online language teacher using Moore and Kearsley's (1996) systems view to show how the teacher and other stakeholders contribute to the success of online learning. This literature review will not analyse the roles played by the online teacher within the virtual classroom (e.g. facilitator, moderator, motivator and modeller) because it has been done by other writers (see Harasim, Hiltz,

Teles, & Turoff, 1997; Hauck & Haezwindt, 1999; Lynch, 2002; White, 2003). Instead, this literature review looks at online language learning as a system, and the role of the teacher as one of the stakeholders in the learning process. This approach will allow us to understand how different components work together, with whom online language teachers have to work and the scope of assistance other stakeholders can provide.

Moore and Kearsley's (1996) systems view was used to describe the distance education (DE) system. Because online learning is a form of DE, the use of the systems view is easily adapted for this literature review. From this point onwards, any reference to DE by these authors and others will be used to refer to online language learning. According to Moore & Kearsley (1996):

a distance education system consists of all the component processes that make up distance education, including learning, teaching, communication, design, and management ... [and] anything that happens in one part of the system has an effect on other parts of the system (p. 5)

They believed that the use of a systems view as a conceptual tool can help us to understand DE and that it can act as a control mechanism that 'ensures all the component processes are well integrated and interact with each other' (p. 6). Based on this systems view, neither the teacher nor the technology alone will make DE work because there are other critical components.

Moore and Kearsley (1996) identified eight key stakeholders in the DE system: student, course developer, site coordinator, tutor, proctor, student support services, management/administration and teacher. Table 3 summarises the stakeholders and their responsibilities. While each stakeholder has his or her own responsibilities, these responsibilities affect those held by the teacher. Additionally, the teacher's responsibilities may overlap with those of other stakeholders, depending on the circumstances at the local and remote sites.<sup>1</sup> Also, depending on the resources available at the remote institution, the roles of some

Table 3. Stakeholders in a distance education system and their responsibilities.

| Stakeholder               | Responsibilities                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Student                   | Self-directing and have learner autonomy                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Course developer          | Works in a team of specialists including technology, content, media, and instructional design specialists                                                                                                 |
| Site coordinator          | Communicates with the teacher, student, and the larger community, organises and manages local circumstances, provides learner support at local site for administrative, technological, and content issues |
| Tutor                     | Provides individualised instruction, grade assignments, and monitor student progress                                                                                                                      |
| Proctor                   | Proctors exams and quizzes at local sites                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Student support services  | Counsellor provides guidance; administrative staff provides routine administrative assistance                                                                                                             |
| Management/administration | Manages policy, planning, staffing, budgets, scheduling, resources, etc                                                                                                                                   |
| Teacher                   | Humanises the learning environment, facilitates and encourages interaction, organises and presents information, and provides feedback                                                                     |

stakeholders, particularly the site coordinator, tutor, proctor and student support services, may overlap.

As an online student, the responsibilities include self-direction and conducting learner autonomy. White (2003) stated that learner autonomy can be developed in two ways. The first approach emphasised learner training while the second emphasised on learners' choice in opportunities and negotiation of meaning in social interactions. In the first approach, learner strategy training is especially important for CALL because language learners cannot be expected to take a significant amount of responsibility for their own learning if they do not know how languages are learned. As pointed out in Smidt and Hegelheimer (2004), some low level learners engaged in wrong input enhancements and they were less likely to use metacognitive strategies while listening to online academic lectures. These resulted in low success rates in comprehension tasks. Hubbard (2004) stressed that CALL learner training is part of the teacher's responsibility to help students make 'informed decisions about how to use computer resources effectively to meet their learning objectives' (p. 51). However, because learner training takes preparation and class time, teachers need to consider the pros and cons before implementing them.

The second learner autonomy approach emphasises negotiation of meaning. White (2003) stated that learner autonomy includes the 'capacity to negotiate and develop control of learning experiences while interacting with others in the learning community' (p. 161). Therefore, teachers should ensure that there are ample interaction opportunities and provide sufficient guidance and support for learners in their selection of learning options.

The next stakeholder in the DE system is the course developer. Moore and Kearsley (1996) identified two common models for course design. The first was the author–editor model, in which the subject matter expert drafted the curriculum and an editor produced the final document. The second model was the course team model, which included technology, media, content and instructional design specialists at different stages of the course development. Each model has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, the author–editor model is a faster and cheaper model but may lack the good instructional design features of the course team model. The role of the teacher can vary significantly depending on which model is used for the creation of the online language course. In many cases where the online language course is a new innovation that is not supported by the department or institution, the teacher may end up becoming the course developer and having to invest a lot of personal resources (time, money and energy) to design the course by himself. The teacher should therefore have some knowledge of free or cheap resources that can be used for online language learning as well as some basic instructional systems design. On the contrary, an online language course that is supported and implemented by the department may have access to resources needed for the course team model.

The site coordinator (SC) plays an important role in a DE system. His responsibilities can vary depending on the resources available at the remote site. However, his primary responsibility is to maintain excellent communication. Moore and Kearsley (1996) said that the SC needed to communicate well with the instructor so he can carry out the instructor's plans. Additionally, the SC has to maintain good communication with the students so he can assist them with their needs. The SC may also need to communicate with the larger community so that information about the course can be disseminated to potential students. Because the SC is in charge of everything at the remote site, he needs to have some technical competence. Some basic technical knowledge required might include software/hardware installation and the ability to troubleshoot or recognise the problems so the appropriate specialists can be contacted. The SC also needs to have some content knowledge so that they can discuss matters with the instructor and assist the students if

necessary. If the SC has some content knowledge, it would be easier to understand the instructor's instructions and 'arrange local circumstances [at the remote site] to see the goal is achieved' (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, p. 245).

In the US K-12 virtual schooling (VS) system, the SC is known as the facilitator and also plays the role of a DE course counsellor where s/he advises students in their selection of DE courses based on their learning needs (Harms, Niederhauser, Davis, Roblyer & Gilbert, 2006). Additionally, Harms et al. said that the facilitator may also serve as 'a coach to prepare students for VS, including the development of organisational and other study skills necessary to be successful online learners' (p. 9). In other words, the facilitator might help students to develop their responsibilities for self-direction and learner autonomy. Harms et al. also added that the facilitator needs to promote co-presence, especially if there is more than one student at the same remote site. The promotion of co-presence can help to increase motivation and peer support. These responsibilities are similar to those shouldered by the student or learner support services in some learning institutions. White (2003) listed three primary functions of learner support: cognitive, affective and systemic. In the first two columns, Table 4 lists the functions and scope of learner support services according to White (2003). The third column in Table 4 lists the roles that, according to different studies, hold similar responsibilities to illustrate the overlap among the roles and responsibilities of site coordinators or facilitators, tutors and student services.

Moore and Kearsley (1996) identified the tutor as a stakeholder in the DE system. They pointed out that some DE systems (especially correspondence courses and open university courses) that have limited or no student-student or student-instructor interactions often appoint a personal tutor to students. This tutor is usually neither the course designer nor the person who presents the course content. The responsibilities of this

Table 4. Functions and scope of learner support services and the overlap in roles.

| Functions of learner support | Scope of learner support services                                           | Role as listed in studies                         |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Cognitive                    | Tutoring                                                                    | Tutor (Moore & Kearsley, 1996)                    |
|                              | Study groups and centres, actual and virtual                                | Student support services (Moore & Kearsley, 1996) |
| Affective                    | Learning support (including study and exam skills seminars, 1:1 assistance) | Facilitator (Harms et al., 2006)                  |
|                              | Guidance and advisory services (including motivational counselling)         | Student support services (Moore & Kearsley, 1996) |
|                              | Residential schools <sup>1</sup>                                            | Facilitator (Harms, et al., 2006)                 |
| Systemic                     | Peer contact                                                                | Student support services (Moore & Kearsley, 1996) |
|                              | Enquiry and admission services                                              | n/a                                               |
|                              | Course/academic information and guidance                                    | Facilitator (Harms et al., 2006)                  |
|                              |                                                                             | Facilitator (Harms et al., 2006)                  |
|                              |                                                                             | Student support services (Moore & Kearsley, 1996) |
|                              |                                                                             | Facilitator (Harms et al., 2006)                  |
|                              |                                                                             | Site coordinator (Moore & Kearsley, 1996)         |

Note: Residential schools in this context refer to those offered by the Open University, UK. 'There are now more than 50 Open University courses running a residential school. These last from one day to a full week and are based at universities, hotels, conference and field study centres in the UK and mainland Europe. Language schools run in France, Germany and Spain.' (Retrieved May 8, 2008 from <http://css2.open.ac.uk/resschools/AboutResSchools.aspx>)

tutor are to interact on a one-to-one basis with the student and to provide individualised instruction. White (2003) listed tutoring responsibilities under learner support services. She shared an example where a weekly one-to-one telephone tutorial allowed the tutor to support the student in the following manner:

- negotiating learning targets for the week;
- identifying further materials for each learner based on individual needs;
- advice on learning routes and language learning strategies;
- feedback on performance – simple error correction offered instantaneously; evaluation and correction of pronunciation and intonation; summary of errors and correction of structures at the end of interchanges; evaluation of progress as a whole. (White, 2003, p. 178)

In addition to the mentioned support, the language tutor can also provide opportunities for oral practice through phone (Radic, 2000, 2001 in White, 2003).

In forms of DE other than correspondence and open university courses, the responsibilities of the tutor as listed by Moore and Kearsley (1996), such as grading assignments and monitoring student progress, can be shouldered by the SC. In the state of Iowa in the USA, the online learning system (Iowa Learning Online (ILO)) mandates the role of a student coach that is similar to Moore and Kearsley's (1996) SC. In addition to the administrative, technical, and content responsibilities, the student coach is also responsible for monitoring student progress and providing reports to both the instructor and the students' parents (see Iowa Learning Online, n.d.). This ILO student coach is also responsible for Moore and Kearsley's proctor's duties, including proctoring quizzes and exams and managing the passwords for students' access to the assessment tools. However, the ILO student coach does not grade the quizzes and exams. In a different Iowa context that is unaffiliated with ILO, the grading responsibilities are taken on by the SC using a rubric provided by the instructor (see Davis & Compton, 2005).

Besides counselling and tutoring services, White (2003) also listed technical support to be a systemic function of learner support services. Examples of technical support included informational technology orientation at the beginning of the course and subsequent support for technological matters throughout the course. This differs from the SC's technical responsibilities listed by Moore and Kearsley (1996), which focused more on the technical matters before and during instruction. White cited Radic (2000) who set up a technical help desk for students. He believed that it was essential to the effectiveness of the course because it not only helped to solve students' technical problems but also established students' confidence in the institution, the delivery mode, the teaching method and the tutor/moderator.

The next stakeholder in Moore & Kearsley's DE system is the management/administration. This level of administrative duty differs from the administrative duties that are held by the SC or the learner support services. Generally, management/administration deals with the budget, resources, staffing, scheduling, policies and other institutional matters. At the remote site, the administrative duties are held by the SC and they include dissemination and distribution of content materials, record keeping and other administrative procedures relating to instructional matters. Meanwhile, learner support staff might provide administrative assistance that includes course registration, fees and other administrative aspects of a course or programme.

The case study of a high school partnership provides a good example of the three levels of administrative duties (see Davis & Compton, 2005). In this case study, a rural Iowa high



school was unable to hire a chemistry teacher. The principal then negotiated with another Iowa high school to offer the course at a distance via the Iowa Communication Network (ICN), a two-way interactive video system with studio classrooms in all school districts and most high schools in Iowa. The two high school principals and school counsellors determined the timetable of the course so students from both schools could work on the course at the same time. They also decided on the teacher who should teach the course and the amount of compensation provided to that teacher. Meanwhile, the SC at the remote site was in charge of administrative procedures such as receiving and distributing materials and record keeping. On the other hand, the secretary at the remote school provided administrative assistance by making copies of a faxed paper quiz from the teacher.

The final stakeholder in the DE system is the online teacher. The responsibility of the online teacher is to develop co-presence in their virtual classroom so the learning environment feels less distant (Harms et al, 2006; Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Building a learning community can promote group rapport and full participation from students. Hiltz (1994) reported that when an online community was successfully fostered, students said they learned more and felt closer to their peers and instructor compared to traditional classroom settings. Additionally, the online teacher has to facilitate and encourage active participation and high levels of interaction. The online teacher also has to be effective in providing feedback so the students can monitor their progress. All these require skills that have been discussed in the previous section.

Moore and Kearsley (1996) pointed out that the responsibilities of the online teacher not only differ from traditional classroom but also depending on which level of DE. They used Michael Mark's (1990) typology that divided DE into four levels as listed in Table 5. An online teacher at the distance learning programme will undoubtedly play more roles than those at the other three levels. For example, an online teacher of a single DE course in a conventional learning institution may have to handle the administrative duties, whereas a distance learning institution would have staff designated specifically for such matters. Additionally, an online teacher of a single course may have to personally provide technical, cognitive affective and systemic support if students are not located at any remote sites where learner support services are available. In a distance learning institution such as the United Kingdom's Open University, there may be no need for online teachers. Instead, the primary instructional role is the tutor who supports the students' learning (see The Open University, n.d.).

This section used Moore and Kearsley's systems view to review the roles and responsibilities of eight stakeholders in an online learning system. Each stakeholder plays

Table 5. Levels of distance education and their definitions (based on Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

| Level                         | Definition                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Distance learning programme   | 'Activities carried out in a conventional college, university, school system, or training department whose primary responsibilities include traditional classroom instruction' (p. 2-3) |
| Distance learning unit        | 'A special and separate unit within a conventional college, university, or school system that is dedicated to distance learning activities' (p. 3)                                      |
| Distance learning institution | 'The sole purpose of the institution is distance education [and] all activities are exclusively devoted to distance education' (p. 3)                                                   |
| Distance learning consortia   | 'Two or more distance learning institutions or units who share in either the design or delivery of program, or both' (p. 4)                                                             |



an important role in making the system work effectively. Depending on the circumstances at the local and remote sites, roles and responsibilities of some stakeholders may overlap, which will in turn affect the responsibilities of the online teacher. Knowing the different components of the system and the scope of responsibilities of each stakeholder can help the online teacher identify to whom and where to turn to for assistance. Furthermore, such awareness can help the online teacher understand his/her own scope of responsibilities and other responsibilities that may need to be absorbed if certain roles are not present in the online learning system. The next section will provide recommendations for language teacher education programmes based on the proposed framework for online language teaching skills (Figure 2) and the systems view of online language learning.

### **Recommendations for language teacher education programmes**

Presently, the main source of professional development in the area of online English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching is offered by the TESOL Organisation through its certificate programme (see TESOL, 2008). The profession has also begun to note the need to identify effective pedagogical frameworks for teaching language online. A special journal issue by CALICO (Stickler & Hauck, 2006b) and collections of works such as Felix (2003b), Goertler and Winke (2008), and Holmberg, Shelley, and White (2005) are great examples of such efforts. Despite these gallant efforts to exemplify good practices of online language teaching through design, technological and pedagogical issues, little emphasis has been placed on teacher education for the twenty-first century beyond the ability to integrate technology into the classroom. Specifically, little has been done to prepare language teachers for online language teaching. Using ideas from earlier sections, such as the proposed framework for online teaching skills and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in an online language learning system, this literature review presents four recommendations for language teacher education to improve the state of preparedness of language teachers for online language teaching: a) developing online language teaching skills through existing courses; b) developing online teaching skills at different levels of expertise and responsibilities for different roles; c) revamping existing technology training; and d) implementing early virtual field experiences and virtual practicum.

### ***Developing online language teaching skills through existing courses***

As presented in the earlier section, online language teaching skills are divided into three categories: a) technology in online language teaching; b) pedagogy of online language teaching; and c) evaluation of online language teaching. Ideally, language teacher education should include technology, methodology and evaluation courses that focus solely on online language teaching issues because online language teaching is very different from traditional language teaching. Realistically however, resource and time constraints would hinder such efforts from fruition at most language teacher education programmes. This literature review does not recommend immediate comprehensive teacher preparation for online language teaching but rather a gradual and progressive change to prepare all language teachers for the possibility of a career in online language teaching. This change involves raising the level of awareness of all language teachers regarding the potential of online language teaching and the knowledge level of basic principles and skills required for successful endeavours in this new system. If language teachers are interested after being exposed to the potential of online language teaching through their TESL or applied linguistics programme, they could then pursue further professional development such as

the certificate programme offered by the TESOL Organisation (TESOL, 2008) or possibly a new certificate or specialisation in existing TESL or applied linguistic programmes.

The skills of incorporating socialisation techniques and fostering an online community are difficult to achieve. Hampel and Stickler (2005) recommended that future online language teachers experienced first hand the 'need for building an online community' through training events in the medium. As Slaouti and Motteram (2006, p. 89) put it: 'teachers need to learn *about* online learning *through* online learning'. This first hand experience – or situated learning – will illuminate the strengths and limitations of the technologies for learning (Hubbard & Levy, 2006) as well as reduce tensions about the realities of real teaching situations (Egbert, 2006). Bauer-Ramazani (2006) shared how a CALL course was successfully offered fully online to help trainee teachers develop the necessary competences for educational technology and apply them in their teaching situations that ranged from TESL to K-12 classrooms. Additionally, the online course itself was carefully designed using principles of distance learning (e.g. Palloff & Pratt, 1998, 2003; Warschauer, 2002) to provide a model of good practice. Kessler (2006) and Peters (2006) called for the integration of CALL training into the overall language teacher training programme including CALL or online language learning components within methodology and pedagogy courses, especially if there is not a CALL specialist available. Also, Hoven (2006, 2007) stressed on the importance of modelling and practice to encourage familiarity with different technologies and their affordances. Thus, curriculum design and methods courses should adopt an online or hybrid/blended approach through which language teachers can experience how online social presence can differ from face-to-face social presence and practice online community building strategies. Also, supplementing traditional in-class experience with online experiences will help to highlight the need for 'netiquette' and the importance of community building strategies that do not rely on visual cues. Besides that, they can also identify online learning design features that are effective and those that are weak.

### ***Developing online teaching skills at different levels of expertise and responsibilities for different roles***

The proposed framework for online teaching skills in the earlier section identified three levels of expertise: novice, proficient and expert. Language teacher training programmes can use this framework to identify the skills that should be developed at different levels of expertise and match that with their curriculum. Skills at the novice level, for example, should be taught in the earlier years of their programmes, while skills at the proficient level should be reserved for the later years. Meanwhile, the skills at the expert level may be slowly developed in the final years and gained through field and practical experiences. (See also the recommendation for early virtual field experiences and virtual practicum below.)

In addition to the different levels of expertise, language teacher training programmes should also prepare their teachers for the possibility of different roles in an online language learning system by integrating knowledge of online teaching skills at the novice level into all existing programmes. While not all teachers are likely to become online language teachers, some might find themselves as elected site coordinators or tutors in their future work place. Therefore, language teachers should know what roles and responsibilities exist in online learning systems and how the different components work together as a system. Additionally, having basic online teaching skills will prepare language teachers for the possibility of supporting an online language learner at a remote site. If all language teacher programmes integrated the development of novice teacher skills into their curriculum, this

could ensure that the language teachers could take on site coordinator or tutor roles if necessary.

### ***Revamping existing technology training***

Mandatory technology training for CALL purposes should be considered early in language teacher training programmes. Hegelheimer (2006, p. 117) believed that 'a mandatory technology course early in a [language] teacher training programme' as a technology foundation can encourage its students to integrate technology more fully. He feared that technology electives taken late in the teacher training programme would limit opportunities for technological proficiency integration in the training process. He reported that a mandatory technology course in a TESL MA programme showed positive impact on its students as they were not only 'more computer-literate and able to construct instructional web resources ... but also more adept at using and critically evaluating technology in their teaching' (p. 125). Results also showed that students were integrating technology in their teaching assignments (as teaching assistants) by creating relevant extensive projects in their own coursework. Also, this recommendation would be more favourable than general technology electives in other departments since the course would focus on TESL. As Hoven (2007, p. 137) pointed out, teachers' adoption of change and innovation are more likely 'when they can see positive benefits in terms of direct relevance to their content area, usefulness from a practical task perspective, and increased effectiveness for their day-to-day classroom teaching.' Additionally, by mandating this course early in the programme, teaching trainees could benefit from the knowledge and skills throughout the rest of their programme and experience increased confidence in teaching with technology – unlike the participants in Peters (2006) who expressed confidence in technological competences after a fourth-year technology integration course 'yet still felt that they were not ready to integrate technology in the language classroom' (p. 163).

While a mandatory technology course is a good recommendation, an alternative is to integrate CALL technology training into existing courses. Peters (2006) and Desjardins and Peters (2007) thought that a single course in technology integration might produce quick technical knowledge and promote the use of technology for teaching rather than the integration of technology in the curriculum. While Desjardins and Peters agreed with Hegelheimer (2006) that a mandatory technology course should be offered early in the programme, she added that this course was usually limited to technical aspects and could send an unwanted message that 'technology is an add-on rather than an integral part of the [teacher education] programme' (2007, p. 5). Simple steps can be taken to avoid this situation. For instance, basic technological skills and knowledge of specific applications taught in existing computer methods courses can be enhanced with discussions of affordances and constraints in specific situations, particularly in online language learning systems. Additionally, assignments, projects and tasks involving the use of technology for language learning should incorporate principles of a selected language theory. For example, using an experiential modelling approach in a technology and language learning course, Hoven (2006, 2007) incorporated the use of blogs, wikis, and e-portfolios that highlighted the principles of social constructive learning. Hoven (2007, p. 137) stated that the experiential modelling approach allows the immersion of students in the use of the technologies while allowing them the experience of 'practical application of the theory in their own learning'. Other examples include the training programme by Hampel and Stickler (2005) in which they used animated online tutorials, specific training for

applications and discussions of possibilities, constraints and implications of the electronic medium for online language teaching to address the lowest levels of skills (technological competence).

### ***Implementing early virtual field experiences and virtual practicum***

Language teacher training programmes can consider offering all their trainee teachers an early virtual field experience in online language learning. This virtual field experience would happen in the early stages of the programme before any student teaching experience and provide opportunities for observation and ‘work with real students, teachers, and curriculum in natural settings’ (i.e. online environments) (Huling, 1998). Such experiences allow teaching trainees to personally experience and observe aspects of online language teaching and online interactions through careful guidance and mediation. These carefully guided observations will provide them ‘with the experiences necessary to build the complex schema required’ to be an effective online language teacher, site coordinator or tutor. (Huling, 1998, p. 3).

Because observation alone cannot provide a rigorous experience (Davis & Rose, 2007) and does not result in substantive learning for effective teaching (Huling, 1998), early virtual field experiences alone are insufficient to prepare trainee teachers for online language teaching. Those who have experienced early virtual field experiences and continue to express interest in a career in teaching languages online should then participate in a virtual practicum. This virtual practicum should be offered in the final stages of the programme after trainee teachers have had more exposure to online language teaching skills at the proficient level through methods, technology and other relevant courses.

Recommendations provided in this section are based on the proposed framework for online language teaching skills (Figure 2) and roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in an online language learning system (Table 3). These recommendations stress a need for **ALL** language teachers to acquire some basic online language teaching skills (at the novice level) so they are at least able to serve as site coordinators or tutors in their future teaching capacity. Those who wish to pursue careers as online language teachers should proceed to gain more knowledge and skills through courses that include the development of online teaching skills at the proficient and expert levels and relevant experience through virtual practicums.

### **Summary and conclusion**

This paper reviewed online language teaching skills, provided a critique of an existing skills framework and highlighted the complexity of identifying online language teaching skills. Online language teachers need to acquire skills beyond technological competence in order to teach effectively in this online environment. While some skills such as technical and software specific skills are easy to learn, other skills, such as facilitating online socialising and community building, can be more challenging. Nonetheless, these skills are essential in order to promote social cohesion that is necessary for meaningful communicative interaction. A proposed framework for online language teaching skills covering three categories of skills (technology, pedagogy and evaluation) at three levels of expertise (novice, proficient and expert) is provided to guide language teacher education programmes.

Additionally, a review of roles and responsibilities of stakeholders using a systems view is included to show how different components work together to promote effective online

learning. In any online language learning system, the online language teacher is likely to work alongside other stakeholders. Each stakeholder bears different responsibilities. Depending on the circumstances and available resources, online language teachers may need to fill in the gap by shouldering additional responsibilities. Online language teachers should be aware of the different roles and responsibilities in the online language learning system so they are able to refer to the appropriate resources as well as identify missing gaps and take necessary actions.

While online language learning has become more possible with the increase in communication tools and the number of online language courses is increasing, teacher training at its present state has not focused on preparing language teachers for the challenges of teaching in an online environment. Since researchers and practitioners have warned against the assumption of a natural transition in teaching skills from a face-to-face classroom into an online environment, teacher educators need to pay more attention to the preparation of future language teachers for this new learning system especially considering that the efforts and cost of creating online materials 'can be wasted without the adequate training of teachers to present and support the learning' (Hampel & Stickler, 2005, p. 312). As Salmon (2003) stated: 'Any significant initiative at changing teaching methods or the introduction of technology into teaching and learning should include effective e-moderator support and training, otherwise its outcomes are likely to be meagre and unsuccessful' (p. 80). Thus, this literature review ends with recommendations for teacher education programmes on how to support the change in learning system through integration of online language teaching and learning related issues in existing curriculum design and methods courses. After all, online language teachers cannot be expected to become effective based on training meant for face-to-face classrooms when these two environments involve different skills and responsibilities. More research needs to be done to identify these skills and responsibilities so that language teacher preparation programmes can continue to improve and serve the needs of future online language teachers.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Niki Davis, my programme committee members, and the reviewers for their constructive feedback on the early drafts of this manuscript. I also want to thank Dr. Shannon Sauro for her help in my thought process on the framework.

### Note

1. 'Local' refers to where the online teacher is located while 'remote' refers to where the DE student is located.

### Notes on contributor

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## Article

# Navigating Online Language Teaching in Uncertain Times: Challenges and Strategies of EFL Educators in Creating a Sustainable Technology-Mediated Language Learning Environment

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**Citation:** Choi, L.; Chung, S. Navigating Online Language Teaching in Uncertain Times: Challenges and Strategies of EFL Educators in Creating a Sustainable Technology-Mediated Language Learning Environment. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 7664. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13147664>

Academic Editors:  
Xuesong (Andy) Gao and  
Mairin Hennebry-Leung

Received: 24 May 2021

Accepted: 7 July 2021

Published: 9 July 2021

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**Abstract:** With the spread of COVID-19 worldwide, teaching and learning have occurred remotely and on digital platforms. An abrupt transition to online education, however, has posited unprecedented challenges for educators, who have been forced to adjust to remote learning with little to no time to prepare. Focusing on the case of an English language program in South Korea, this case study examines the challenges and strategies that were emerging in the crisis-prompted online language learning and teaching context. In particular, this case study focuses on investigating what types of strategies English as-a foreign language (EFL) instructors with little prior experience teaching online used to create a sustainable and authentic technology-mediated language learning environment, and how they motivated language learners to actively participate in sustainable language development and use. Findings provide educators and administrators who have little to no experience teaching online with practical suggestions and ideas to consider. They can use these concepts to adapt their lesson plans to online platforms and design and deliver high-quality lessons that ensure students feel connected to their learning process and have sustainable language learning experiences.

**Keywords:** English as a foreign language; sustainable learning; remote learning; teacher development; higher education

## 1. Introduction

With the spread of COVID-19 worldwide, teaching and learning have occurred remotely and on digital platforms. Many universities and school systems around the world switched to emergency remote learning to maintain instructional continuity in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bozkurt and Sharma [1]; OECD [2]). An abrupt transition to online education, however, has posited unprecedented challenges for educators, who have been forced to adjust to remote learning with little to no time to prepare. Transitioning to an online learning environment can be particularly challenging for language educators whose main goal is to help learners develop their target language proficiency by encouraging meaningful and authentic interaction among learners and providing adequate feedback (González-Lloret [3]; Lomicka [4]). As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, many organizations and governments around the world provide language teachers and practitioners with instructional materials and resources for online teaching. Even though these resources and support could enable language educators to navigate through these uncertain times, it is necessary to take a look at the needs and experiences of language educators in order to further our understanding of the challenges they face and potential practical solutions at their disposal for creating sustainable technology-mediated language learning and teaching in times of crisis.



Focusing on the case of an English language program in Seoul Metropolitan University in South Korea, this qualitative case study examines the challenges and strategies that were emerging in the crisis-prompted online language learning and teaching context. In particular, this case study focuses on investigating what types of strategies English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors with little prior experience teaching online used to create a sustainable and authentic technology-mediated language learning environment, and how they motivated language learners to actively participate in sustainable language development and use. Findings provide educators and administrators who have little to no experience teaching online with practical suggestions and ideas to consider. They can use these concepts to adapt their lesson plans to online platforms and design and deliver high-quality lessons that ensure students feel connected to their learning process and have sustainable language learning experiences.

## 2. Literature Review

With the advancement of information technology, remote language learning has increasingly been seen as an effective way to provide learners with more interactive and collaborative language learning environments. Effective online language learning and teaching involves a set of skills and knowledge different from those that have been used in traditional face-to-face teaching environments (see Baran et al. [5] for further discussion). Teaching online, thus, can be particularly challenging for educators who have little experience designing or delivering material via an online classroom because they tend to “introduce a new activity into existing institutions with established roles” (Natrielle [6]; p. 1890). In addition, online language teaching can present language teachers and students with various challenges, including limited online platforms that allow students to engage in authentic language interaction, difficulty in monitoring individual students’ progress and work, and a lack of overall student motivation to actively participate in virtual interaction (e.g., Hampel and Stickler [7]; Lamy and Hampel [8]; Russell and Murphy-Judy [9]; and Sun [10]).

In comparing online learning and traditional face-to-face learning, recent studies point out the importance of a transformed teacher role and professional development in online classroom settings. They emphasize that it is important for language educators and practitioners to reconceptualize their approach to language teaching and learning, reimagine their role in promoting and facilitating learners’ meaningful interaction, and transform their teaching practice to meet the specific needs of learners in online language learning and teaching contexts. Recently, the sudden shift from face-to-face teaching to online teaching in higher education due to the COVID-19 pandemic has required language teaching professionals to apply technology-mediated, sustainable innovations to reframe teaching practices. Technology-mediated, sustainable teaching promotes the consideration of specific teaching contexts and student needs and expectations to encourage the development of creative technology-enhanced teaching design solutions based on autonomous, teacher-driven innovations and collaboration (Bennett et al. [11]). As suggested by recent studies, the following are the key features of an effective online language educators who can successfully enhance their students’ sustainable language development and use:

1. Language educators need to look for alternative ways to engage learners through virtual communication (Berge [12]; and Hampel and Stickler [7]);
2. Language educators need to support learners’ autonomy during online language teaching and learning (Reinders and White [13]; and Stockwell and Reinders [14]);
3. Language educators need to create technology-mediated tasks that promote authentic interaction and meaningful collaboration (González-Lloret [3]; and González-Lloret and Ortega [15]);
4. Language educators need to create virtual language communities in which learners develop and maintain feelings of social connectedness (Bolliger and Inan [16]; Lomicka [4]).

These recent studies all highlight the active and agentive role of language educators in establishing and sustaining interactive and connected virtual language learning environments through which they promote collaborative and meaningful interaction, and at the same time create a sustainable and authentic technology-mediated language learning environment.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at an English language program in Seoul Metropolitan University (SMU), a private South Korean university located in the Seoul Metropolitan Area. In an attempt to internationalize its campus and enhance students' competitiveness in the global market, the university mandates that all freshmen students must take two English conversation courses, "Basic English conversation" and "Advanced English conversation," over the course of two consecutive semesters. The required English conversation courses are taught by native English-speaking instructors and they meet once a week for two hours each, with the primary goal of providing freshmen students with opportunities to improve their oral language proficiency in English. These courses are largely devoted to speaking practice such as role plays, discussions and oral presentations. Each section of the required English conversation courses has approximately 20 students and the sections are categorized based on students' majors. All sections, regardless of major, use the same textbook and adhere to a shared curriculum.

The participants included seven EFL instructors who remotely taught an English conversation course required for all freshmen students in Spring 2020 (for participants' demographic characteristics, see Table 1). The participants' mean age was 44.4 (SD = 8.3). They had an average of 14.9 years (SD = 5.5) of teaching experience in EFL contexts and 11 years (SD = 5.2) of teaching experience in South Korean higher education. Despite the differences in participants' EFL teaching experiences, none of the participating instructors reported having received any formal training or education regarding online teaching prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two of seven participating instructors had the experience of teaching blended learning courses prior to the current outbreak, but their experience was limited to a one-time course or workshop. At the beginning of the semester, all seven participants received an emergency remote learning and teaching guide (a 20-page power point document) and an hour-long workshop provided by the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), affiliated with the university. The formal training provided by the university included instructions on using Webex, a video-conferencing tool provided by the university, and extensive training using a Moodle-based learning management system (LMS) that had traditionally been used at the university. Both the written guide and workshop provided instructors with basic information about how to set up courses for online delivery and how to utilize video-conferencing tools and online platforms for designing and delivering online courses. Additional teaching support provided online teaching and classroom management ideas from CTL, mostly on troubleshooting and increasing student engagement during classes on Webex.

**Table 1.** Participants' demographic characteristics.

| Participants | Gender | Teaching Experience in EFL Context | Teaching Experience in Korean Higher Education | Online Language Teaching Experience |
|--------------|--------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Logan        | Male   | 12.5 years                         | 11.5 years                                     | No                                  |
| Elliott      | Male   | 12 years                           | 8 years                                        | No                                  |
| Caleb        | Male   | 23 years                           | 8 years                                        | Yes                                 |
| Matt         | Male   | 14 years                           | 10 years                                       | Yes                                 |
| Gina         | Female | 7 years                            | 5 years                                        | No                                  |
| Lois         | Female | 21 years                           | 21 years                                       | No                                  |
| Jake         | Male   | 14.5 years                         | 13.5 years                                     | No                                  |

### 3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted using a case study methodology (Miles and Huberman [17]) to effectively conceptualize the challenges and strategies that were emerging during the first semester of fully transitioning to emergency remote learning. Data were collected during the course of the semester (February 2020–July 2020), using ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews. Data collection included (a) administrator-level: bi-weekly faculty meeting minutes and reflection notes, the COVID-19 related university policy documents; (b) faculty-level: informal faculty meeting notes, email exchanges among participants and between participants and university administrators; (c) classroom-level: informal classroom observations and teaching materials and activity descriptions. In addition, researchers conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with all the participating faculty members and the program administrator to fully understand the experiences and decision-making processes in times of crisis.

Throughout the research period, researchers attended eight faculty meetings in which EFL instructors, including participants in the study, shared their difficulties and problems with online language teaching and discussed possible strategies to address these challenges. Each meeting lasted between 45 min and 1.5 h. After each meeting, researchers wrote reflection notes to document informal conversations and non-verbal responses along with their initial thoughts. Six hours of informal classroom observation and follow-up discussions with participating instructors were conducted. Informal classroom observation was used because it is an effective way to observe teachers' teaching practices without giving them the impression of being evaluated (Downey et al. [18]). Because qualitative interview allows researchers to collect detailed accounts of participants' experiences (Rubin and Rubin [19]), we conducted qualitative interviews at the end of the semester with all the participating instructors to fully understand their experiences and perceptions regarding online language teaching in times of crisis. Each interview lasted from 1 to 2.5 h, and all interviews were conducted in English. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, 98 entries of online interaction data were collected and thematically analyzed. Grounded theory techniques (see Figure 1) were employed to interpret different sets of qualitative data gathered in this study, as well as to elicit recurring themes and patterns (Glaser and Strauss [20]; Strauss and Cobin [21]). Because these techniques aim to consolidate different data sets into matrices in order to generate recurring themes and patterns, all the qualitative data were first coded line-by-line by using action-oriented descriptors (open coding). This also involved examining data to identify the properties of the themes and their interrelationships such as similarities and differences in participating instructors' narratives of their experiences. Line-by-line coding was followed by two selective coding categories: (a) all the data were sorted chronologically in order to understand the overall experience of participating instructors, and (b) all the data were sorted and coded thematically in order to identify core themes and categories to create a story line (Strauss and Cobin [21]). Selected coding condensed the data set, and allowed a comparison of participating instructors' experiences, challenges and strategies across different data sources (Charmaz, [22]). Because this study aimed to conceptualize the challenges and strategies that were emerging in the crisis-prompted online language learning and teaching context, we also examined and organized the data both chronologically and thematically.

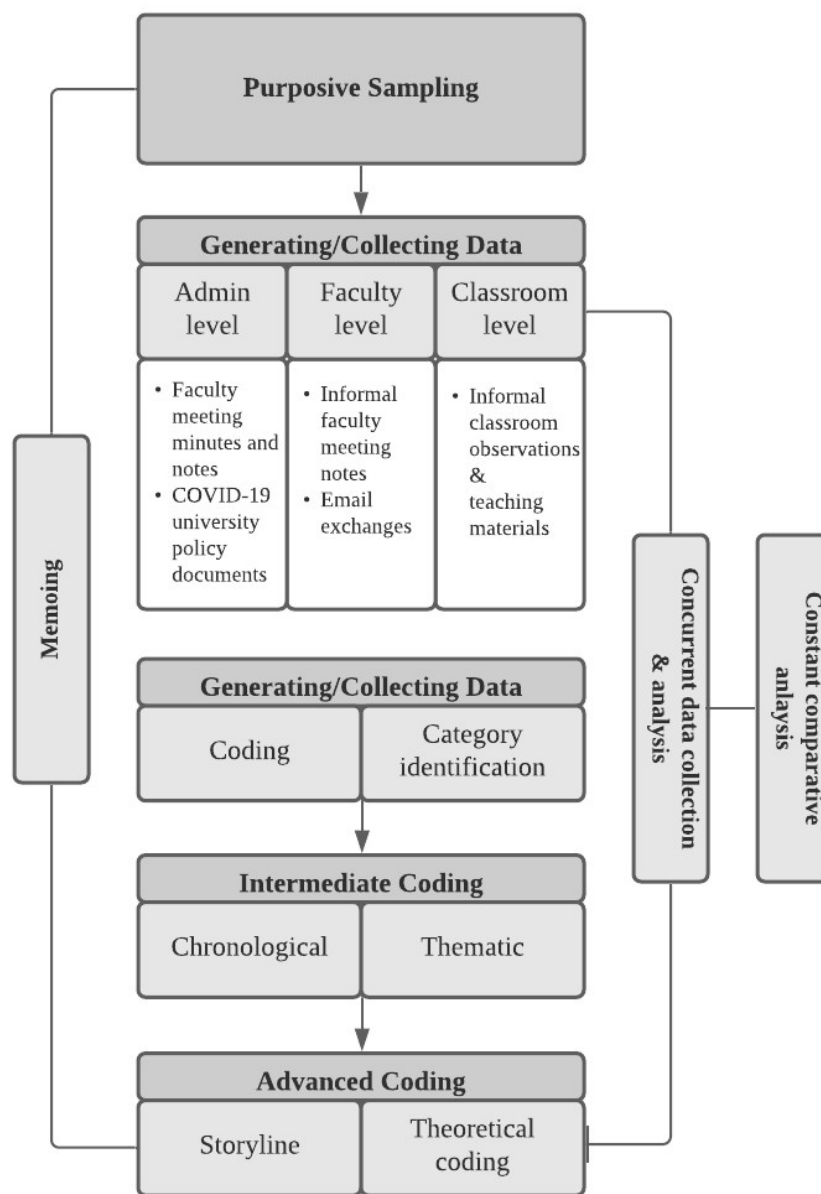


**Figure 1.** Data collection and analysis process.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Emergency Remote Language Teaching: EFL Instructors' Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the entire South Korean educational system, and has led to nationwide school closures, encompassing all sectors of the educational spectrum, from kindergarten through higher education. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, most universities and schools in South Korea modified their Spring 2020 schedules and postponed the start of the school year. Alongside many South Korean universities, SMU changed its academic calendar and modes of instruction multiple times between February and May 2020 (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Timeline of major events and changes during Spring 2020.

| Date            | COVID-19 Outbreak                                                                          | S. Korean Government                                                                | Seoul Metropolitan University                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6 February 2020 | Total confirmed cases: 23<br>Daily new cases: 4                                            | Provided COVID-19 infection prevention and control guide.                           | Released first announcement regarding postponing the start of semester from 2 March 2020 to 16 March 2020.                                                                     |
| 4 March 2020    | Total confirmed cases: 5328<br>Daily new cases: 516                                        | Provided social distancing recommendations.                                         | Released second announcement regarding postponing the start of semester from 16 March 2020 to 30 March 2020.                                                                   |
| 24 March 2020   | Total confirmed cases: 9037<br>Daily new cases: 76                                         | Provided social distancing recommendations.                                         | Announced that all the classes should be held via synchronous online sessions on a temporary basis until further notice. Provided tutorial information about remote education. |
| 31 May 2020     | Total confirmed cases: 11,468<br>Daily new cases: 27<br>Total confirmed cases on campus: 2 | Recommendation to social distance in daily life ( <i>saenghwal sog geolidugi</i> ). | Announced that all the classes would be held remotely throughout the entire semester.                                                                                          |

At the beginning of February 2020, SMU first postponed the start of the semester from 2 March to 16 March 2020. Since South Korea entered a new phase of local transmission beginning on 18 February 2020, SMU delayed the opening of its semester until 30 March 2020, and required all classes to be held remotely on a temporary basis until further notice. As nationwide social distancing requirements continued and two then-current SMU students tested positive for COVID-19, SMU announced on 31 May 2020 that all the classes would be held remotely for the remainder of the semester.

Faced with this constantly changing scenario and attendant uncertainties, participants were struggling to adapt their instruction to online formats on short notice and to find ways to increase their skills and familiarity with educational technologies to successfully deliver online language teaching. Through interviews and faculty meetings, participating instructors variously described their experiences in teaching during Spring 2020 as “walking through the fog”, “very challenging”, “hard to navigate through” and “a struggle to survive”. Even though SMU and other inter- and intra-national organizations provided various resources for virtual instruction and online learning, all the participating instructors reported that they believed that there was often a lack of adequate and timely support and guidance throughout the semester. As previous studies have pointed out, transitioning to teaching fully online requires professional training for educators who need to develop new approaches to education and adopt new competencies in online teaching environments (Adnan [23]; Berge [11]; Gacs et al. [24]; and Hampel and Stickler [7]). During this sudden educational disruption, instructors, however, were asked to quickly switch to an online course delivery without receiving sufficient training or support for how to establish online-ready classrooms and create interactive online learning environments using digital devices and online platforms.

As participating instructors navigated through constantly changing circumstances and demands throughout the semester, they experienced four phases of professional development: (a) a preparation phase (prior to the start of the semester), (b) an exploration phase (week 1–week 4), (c) an adjustment phase (week 5–week 9), and (d) a mastery phase (week 10–week 15). As shown in Table 3, participating instructors were given a week to make their transition from face-to-face classrooms to distance and online learning environments. All the participating instructors pointed out that it was challenging to redesign their courses without having completely clear directions regarding the form of instruction and instructional guidance, such as how long they would be teaching remotely and what kinds of digital platforms would be available for use in their classrooms.



**Table 3.** Different challenges emerged during Spring 2020.

| Phase                                                | Major Challenges                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Major Tasks to Be Completed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Preparation Phase</b><br>(24–29 March 2020)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uncertainty over form of instruction</li> <li>- Lack of training and resources for online teaching</li> </ul>                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learn how to use digital tools and online platforms, including Webex, which was recommended for use by the university</li> <li>- Redesign face-to-face course for an online format</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Exploration Phase</b><br>(30 March–26 April 2020) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technology-related issues such as software installation and troubleshooting, internet inaccessibility and poor technical skills</li> <li>- Students' poor technical skills</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share technology-related issues and discuss practical solutions</li> <li>- Provide students technological support and guidance</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Adjustment Phase</b><br>(27 April–31 May 2020)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insufficient interaction among students and between students and instructors</li> <li>- Students' perceived feelings of being disconnected</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set up a digital platform through which students may easily access class materials and ask questions</li> <li>- Share ideas and information with other faculty members on a regular basis via emails, meetings and workshops</li> <li>- Explore different online platforms such as Webex, Zoom, Kahoot! and Flipgrid to create interactive classrooms</li> <li>- Explore different online platforms such as Moodle Quizzes, Schoology and Edpuzzle to provide quality online language assessment</li> </ul> |
| <b>Mastery Phase</b><br>(1–10 June 2020)             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insufficient opportunities to enable students to engage in collaborative interaction and sustainable language development and use</li> </ul>                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create and maintain virtual language learning communities by using online platforms</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

As the semester began and instructors and their students began to hold synchronous sessions, participating instructors moved into the second phase in which they experienced various technology-related issues such as software installation and troubleshooting and internet inaccessibility and poor technical skills, along with students' poor connectivity issues and limited technical skills. In order to solve these issues, they actively shared emerging challenges daily via emails, online messengers and the Google spreadsheet, and collaboratively worked to create practical solutions that could address these technology-related issues. The following email sent by Jake on 4 April illustrates how actively and collaboratively these EFL instructors navigated through uncertain times:

*"If anyone is interested, I will plan on being online with Webex today at 6 p.m. I am interested in sharing some of my ideas and hearing from others as to how they plan on using a video conferencing tool for their online classes next week as there were a number of concerns in some of the comments from the Google feedback sheet. Many said this week went well, barring some technical issues, but moving forward some were not sure how to approach this coming week. I hope you are able to join and share some of your ideas or listen to the ideas of others."* (Email written by Jake, 4 April 2020)

In addition, they often consulted with university administrators to obtain needed support and services to ensure better connectivity with students. Most of the initial issues addressed in the first month were gradually but quickly resolved, and participating instructors no longer experienced major technology-related issues after the fourth week.

In the third phase, participating instructors reported insufficient student interaction and lack of participation as the two major challenges they faced in their online language classrooms. They pointed out that students were less willing to participate in online interaction due to their lack of motivation and reported feelings of being disconnected (c.f., Bolliger and Inan [16]; Lomicka [4]). In order to arouse students' motivation and increase



their participation in online language learning, participating teachers actively explored different online platforms such as Webex, Zoom, Kahoot! and Flipgrid, and searched for information regarding available technologies and resources to create interactive and engaging language learning environments. Additionally, they often shared information about online platforms and their effectiveness among themselves and with their colleagues who were also teaching English at a tertiary educational institution across the world. All the participating instructors stated that joining in this self-generated professional community helped them further their thought processes and professional development (c.f., Adnan [23]; Paesani [25]).

In the last phase, they also worked on creating and maintaining virtual language learning communities as an attempt to facilitate a collaborative interaction among students and to foster their sustainable language learning and use. Compared to face-to-face language learning classrooms, participating instructors stated that they felt that their online classrooms were more teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for a collaborative interaction among students. They all stated that their experience of teaching online for the previous nine weeks and their intense investment in adopting new competencies in online teaching enabled them to navigate their way through different digital tools and online platforms to design and create their own online classrooms. With newly acquired skills and knowledge about educational technologies, all the participating instructors in this phase worked on establishing virtual language learning communities for their students, which they said they believe could enhance students' feelings of social connectedness and increase their self-efficacy beliefs.

#### 4.2. Emergency Remote Language Teaching: EFL Instructors' Strategies

While a meaningful and collaborative interaction is central to language learning classrooms (Gass [26]; Swain and Watanabe [27]), it is never easy to promote a meaningful language learning experience in online learning environments. Indeed, all the instructors in the present study pointed out that the reported lesser amount of interactivity and collaborative effort was one of the major challenges they encountered during Spring 2020, compared to traditional face-to-face language learning classrooms. As one instructor described:

*"I have been teaching English conversation courses for more than fifteen years in Korea. And I know exactly what to do to make my students talk to each other and work together. But teaching English online was really different from teaching offline. I taught freshmen who hadn't met each other in person. And most of them hadn't even been on a campus because of the coronavirus. They were shy and didn't want to make any mistakes or say something that could come across as weird . . . At the beginning of the semester, I had a really hard time to make students say something to each other, even simple things like 'hello' and 'how are you?'." (Louis, an individual interview)*

Similar accounts can be found in interviews and faculty meetings where participating instructors found it challenging to stimulate students to engage in online conversations. In traditional face-to-face classrooms, all the participating instructors encouraged their students to constantly engage in pair work, group discussions and presentations, and to work to facilitate student interactions and collaborations. As the above interview excerpt illustrates, the instructors realized that the strategies and techniques effectively used in traditional face-to-face classrooms were not transferred to technology-mediated language learning classrooms. Therefore, they needed to develop new strategies for motivating students to participate in class interactions by creating and maintaining a safe space through which students could comfortably and confidently engage in meaningful interactions. The major strategies they developed and used included (a) enhancing the feeling of social connectedness by encouraging students to be virtually present and accessible, and (b) providing students with goal-directed and sustainable technology-mediated tasks.

#### 4.2.1. Enhance the Feeling of Social Connectedness by Encouraging Everyone to Be Virtually Present and Accessible

In order to encourage students' collaborative interaction and active participation, all the participating instructors stressed the importance of increasing students' feelings of connectedness and belongingness. Their arguments resonated with recent research findings, which have identified social presence as key to enhancing students' degrees of participation in and satisfaction with online learning (Gunawardena et al. [28]; Gunawardena and Zittle [29]; Hostetter and Busch [30]; Richardson and Swan [31]). Social presence refers to an individual's perceived sense of online community and salience of proximity and intimacy that is experienced with another person in a technology-mediated communication setting (Short et al. [32]). All the participating teachers pointed out that a higher level of social presence significantly increased students' interaction with and participation in online language classrooms, especially EFL online classrooms, in which language learners may experience apprehension about the effectiveness of their various means of communication, fear of receiving a negative evaluation and test anxiety. The following is the list of strategies participating teachers used to develop students' feelings of connectedness in online language learning environments:

1. Encourage students to turn on the webcam and be virtually present in online learning environments;
2. Encourage students to show their virtual presence by using non-verbal communication cues such as physical gestures: "Please give the thumbs up sign if you understood the question", and "Please form a circle with your thumb and forefinger if you are ready for the next activity";
3. Ask students to collaboratively write a summary of their group work via Google Docs while engaging in group discussions and projects;
4. Be visible and virtually accessible to students who might need extra support or intervention;
5. Sympathize with students' feelings of being isolated or uneasy in remote settings.

Since online language learning classrooms were new to their students, all the participating instructors emphasized the importance of staying visible and being virtually accessible to their students. Some specific strategies used by the participating instructors include turning on the webcam during the entire class, setting up a group chat via KakaoTalk (a multifaceted messaging application widely used in South Korea) to easily communicate with students during non-class hours, and creating video-recorded class announcements or instructions. As one instructor reported:

*"I really opened up to them and said to them, 'If you have any questions, please [feel free to contact me anytime, day or night]'. [At first] they felt like they were bothering me. They were like 'sorry to be bothering you during the weekend'. And I was like 'you are not a bother. I am here. I am here 24/7 ... I don't mind getting a KakaoTalk message at 3 a.m. ... I am here to help you. We will work together and we all will have a great semester' ... I spent most of my time trying to motivate them so that they can feel comfortable and express themselves ... At the end of the semester, many students said 'thank you because I felt more confident online and more confident talking online.'"* (Jake, an individual interview)

Jake also stated that being visible and present was essential for creating a virtual language learning environment in which students developed a sense of social connectedness and built a mutual understanding of expectations and goals (c.f., Meskill and Anthony [31]). In addition, four participating instructors highlighted the need for understanding and sympathizing with students' uneasiness about online learning and virtual communication so that they could better assist students in developing feelings of connectedness. As one instructor noted:

*"They said they enjoyed my class and I had a lot of fun even though it was online. They were like me: a lot of students were like a die-hard offline fan. [I told them] 'I am an*

*offline person. Me, too. I can't stand this'. And then we kind of laughed about it together. They were like 'so we can't have a class at coffeeshops or somewhere' [laughing]. [I told them] 'Let's make sure to be safe. I want it to be offline more than any of you guys. Trust me, but let's just be safe.'"* (Caleb, an individual interview)

Caleb and other participating instructors explained that sharing their uneasiness and discomfort about online teaching helped them to foster a sense of mutual understanding and connection in their online classrooms. They also claimed that sharing their personal stories and experiences with students enabled their students to be more open and willing to participate in meaningful interactions. Their accounts aligned with recent arguments concerning the power of acknowledging one's imperfections and sharing personalized stories with students (see Lomicka [4] for more discussion).

#### 4.2.2. Provide Students Sustainable and Authentic Technology-Mediated Tasks

Recent studies on online language learning have emphasized the importance of designing and providing meaningful tasks in order to raise students' motivation and sense of autonomy (e.g., Baralt and Morcillo Gómez [33]; González-Lloret [34]). González-Lloret and Ortega [14], for example, identified effective technology-mediated tasks for language teaching, as follows: (a) focus on meaning, (b) goal-oriented with a communicative purpose, (c) related to students' needs and real-world interests, (d) involved in experiential learning. Similarly, designing appropriate tasks had been the most discussed issue among participating instructors throughout the semester. As they experienced the lack of students' engagement and motivation in online language learning environments, they realized the importance of providing students with goal-directed, sustainable and authentic tasks by which students could autonomously engage in a meaningful and collaborative interaction. Thus, in the middle of the semester, all the participating instructors changed the nature of language learning tasks used in their online classrooms. They characterized effective technology-mediated language learning tasks as follows:

1. Provide students with more goal-oriented tasks that required them to use target language features for task accomplishment;
2. Provide students with more sustainable tasks that could be accomplished through a series of practical activities;
3. Provide students with more authentic tasks that are relevant to their daily lives.

Elliot, for example, asked his students to create a weekly, two-minute personal narrative in which they share stories or opinions using target language features. These narratives would be video-recorded and uploaded online so that students and instructor could provide one another with comments and feedback. He also gave students individual feedback on both form- and content-related issues. He found that this type of technology-mediated task not only enhanced students' interaction but also increased their level of satisfaction:

*"Rather than having a big speaking exam at the end of the semester, I decided to give students weekly assignments where students can interact and I can check their progress. Starting from Week 8, all the students need to create and upload their weekly assignment ... I got so many comments from students, saying, 'When I first started to do the Flipgrid every week, I couldn't stand it. I hated it.' In the middle of the semester, [students told me] 'Well, it's not too bad. I know what I need to do for the homework and it's nice to see my progress.' And then by the end, [students told me] 'I don't feel scared. If you ask me to speak in English, I can do it. I don't feel scared anymore'."* (Elliot, an individual interview)

Others redesigned their language learning tasks to make them more sustainable and authentic, such as when students were asked to engage in a series of connected practical activities and interject their own personal experiences or stories. The following is an activity that an instructor named Gina used in her conversation class:

As outlined in Table 4, Gina gave her students a series of language tasks by which the students could individually and later collaboratively use target language features and

engage in authentic interaction. All the participating instructors reported that goal-oriented, sustainable and authentic technology-mediated language learning tasks not only enhanced students' degree of engagement but also increased their collaborative interactions.

**Table 4.** An example of sustainable and authentic technology-mediated language learning tasks.

| Week       | Activities                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 10–11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learn about an everyday hero in our society</li> <li>- Learn target language forms and complete short individual assignments</li> <li>- Receive individual feedback</li> </ul> |
| Week 12    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual work: Create a 1 min video about your own hero, using target language forms</li> <li>- Receive feedback from instructor and peers</li> </ul>                        |
| Week 13    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pair work: Create a 2 min video featuring a mock interview with your own hero using target forms</li> <li>- Receive feedback from instructor and peers</li> </ul>              |
| Week 14–15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group work: Create a 3 min video introducing everyday heroes in our society</li> <li>- Receive feedback from instructor and peers</li> </ul>                                   |

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

*"There were some technical issues. In the beginning, there was some clashing, which was very frustrating. And I felt that the online learning format did not provide enough support that we needed. But it evolved and I embraced it. And I am grateful for the experience."* (Jake, an individual interview)

*"This semester was very different and the real challenge was to find right tools and tasks to promote interaction . . . I had been working closely with other faculty members to navigate through this semester full of challenges and uncertainties . . . I do feel like it was a successful semester and I learned a lot."* (Matt, an individual interview)

As the above interview excerpts from two participating instructors illustrate, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it a new set of challenges for language educators to overcome, and at the same time opportunities for them to rethink instruction towards more sustainable and authentic language learning (c.f., Moser et al. [35]). As the findings of this paper reveal, it is important to think about how to effectively provide language educators with sustainable training and professional development so that they can foster students' language learning in the post-COVID 19 era. Findings suggest three pedagogical implications concerning technology-mediated, sustainable teaching.

First, it is important to provide language educators with the adequate training and experience necessary to effectively use interactive digital platforms and tools to enhance students' active engagement in a meaningful and collaborative interaction online. While all the participating instructors used Webex and a Moodle-based learning management system as the main platform for instruction, they all found the use of interactive digital platforms as a supplementary teaching tool effective in increasing students' interaction and fostering their sustainable language learning and use. They, for example, used Padlet, Flipgrid and Google Docs for collaborative activities, and Kahoot!, Quizzes, Edpuzzle, and Genially for mini quizzes and tests. They also actively used mobile instant messaging applications such as KakaoTalk and Line to increase both student–teacher and student–student interaction. They all stated that these interactive digital platforms create an immediate but private space where students can autonomously engage in meaningful interaction. They, however, stated that it was challenging for them to effectively use technology and digital tools with little experience and training. As Koehler et al. [36] point out, technology in language learning and teaching is "not an add-on but rather integral to teaching performance" (151).

That is, language educators need to have adequate training and sufficient opportunities to become familiar with different digital tools, and develop their skills to integrate them into language teaching (e.g., Jiang et al. [37]; Liu and Kleinsasser [38]; Lomnicka [4]; Paesani [23]). In addition, findings showed that unlike a well-planned online learning and teaching environment, the hastily assembled online language learning environment caused various technology-related issues at the beginning of the semester, including limited access to technology infrastructure and connectivity issues. It is noteworthy that in this initial phase, participating instructors in their first phase conducted a troubleshooting session among themselves nearly every day for the first two weeks of the semester. Given that many educators were not accustomed to online teaching and educational technologies prior to the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to provide them with more tailored technical support (c.f., Langford and Damaşa [39]).

Second, it may be necessary to promote the concept of collective responsibility among language educators in order to encourage them to be part of teachers' sustained professional conversation. Teachers' collective responsibility was central to their collaborative professional development. As recent studies have highlighted, teachers' collective responsibility for student learning can be positively and significantly related to teachers' willingness to hold themselves accountable for collaborative and sustainable professional development, which can enhance students' academic success (c.f., Huang et al. [40]; Laferrière et al. [41]; MacIntyre et al. [42]; Vo and Nguyen [43]; Zonoubi et al. [44]). In more practical terms, since many language educators are struggling to adjust their teaching practices during this worldwide health crisis, building professional communities either online or face-to-face would be an effective way for them to work together to navigate their way through this constantly changing set of circumstances. In addition, promoting collective responsibility and cooperation among language educators can create school culture that can foster students' sustainable language learning and development.

Third, it is important to promote self-generated communities of practice where teachers can collaboratively work with others and participate in continuous professional development. In this study, all the participating instructors found their self-generated professional community extremely helpful, as they worked collaboratively to reflect on their online teaching experiences and devise practical solutions and strategies to make their online classes more interactive and engaging. As recent studies have highlighted, promoting self-generated communities of practice can not only enable teachers to become more agentive but also empower teachers in a sustainable and lifelong professional development perspective (c.f., Katsarou and Tsafos [45]; James and Augustin [46]). Because the study examined the case of EFL instructors in a university setting, the findings might not be accurately portraying the needs and experiences of educators and administrators in different contexts. The study, however, provides some practical suggestions and strategies that educators and administrators at all levels across the world might consider while making a rapid transition to online learning. As Daniela et al. [47] point out, it is important for school administrators and policymakers to understand the struggles and needs that educators are facing in times of crisis, and provide them with effective technical and instructional assistance that enable them to redesign curricula and pedagogical practices to develop sustainable education.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, S.C. and L.C.; formal analysis, S.C. and L.C.; investigation, S.C. and L.C.; methodology, S.C. and L.C.; writing—original draft, S.C. and L.C.; writing—review & editing, S.C. and L.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This work was supported by 2021 Hongik University Research Fund.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.



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## Parental involvement in traditional and online education

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**Abstract:** While parental involvement benefits the learning performance of elementary students and the internet changes the learning environment, few studies have examined how parents are involved in the virtual world. This two-year project analysed the effects of parental involvement at home, in school and on internet use. The first stage of our research proposes an e-Homebook System, which provides a communication interface through internet for teachers, students and parents. The second stage analysed 13 classes in five different elementary schools to observe parental involvement in the e-Homebook System. At the same time, a questionnaire survey was used to collect data for parental involvement at home and school. The associations among parental background, parental involvement and student learning performance (evaluated as curricula performance, GPA) were then analysed. The analytical results indicated that parental involvement is significantly associated with student learning performance. The background of parents influenced involvement behaviour. Recommendations are suggested for the government, school and parents.

**Keywords:** learning performance, parent involvement, e-learning.

**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Chen, H-M. and Chang, C-S. (2011) 'Parental involvement in traditional and online education', *Int. J. Learning and Change*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.158–177.

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## **1 Introduction**

The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys of key competencies of 15-year-old students in OECD member countries and partner countries/economies. Results from PISA suggest that schools and countries where students work in a climate characterised by high performance expectations and the readiness to invest effort, good teacher–student relations. Accounting for socio-economic background and other aspects of the learning environment measured by PISA showed that student performance is positively related to better teacher–student relationship, a better disciplinary climate and to teacher-related factors affecting school climate. Finland, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore and Korea, whose performances are better than Taiwan in reading and science with most successful school systems, grant greater autonomy to individual schools to design curricula and establish assessment policies, but these school systems do not necessarily offer parents a choice of schools for their children. Taiwan, Finland, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, Korea, Japan and Macao are classified as having greater autonomy in curriculum and assessment, but Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and Macao provide lower school choice for parents and students (University of Tainan, 2009) (PISA, 2009).

Parents are often considered to have only a minor role in the traditional education environment of elementary schools in Taiwan. Teachers, who design teaching materials, arrange teaching programmes and evaluate student learning performance, are considered the dominant factor. Parents are expected to support their children and the school curriculum. Parents seldom give opinions about teaching methods, class management and school affairs. Communication between family and school is rare and usually maintained only one-way contact by the teacher. However, tremendous changes have occurred in the social, economic, cultural and educational environment of Taiwan. The ‘Teacher Law’ legally requires parental involvement in school decision-making. ‘Open Education’ policies welcome parents to participate actively in class management and school affairs. Parent participation in education is presumed to benefit student learning performance and human resource allocation.

The researches in this study examined the involvement of parents in preschool and elementary education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) and Miedel and Reynolds (1999) found that parental involvement is beneficial to learning and academic achievement. Turnbull and Winton (1984) and Barnard (2004) proposed that parental involvement is very important in child education using experimental data. Some researches proved that high parental involvement in education is beneficial to children’s cognition and social and emotional developments, better the relations between children and parents, and to increase their devotion to the community. The energetic parental involvement is also

related to the children's performance at school, class attendance rate and positive attitude towards education, personal character and future education (Epstein, 1983; Fehrmann et al., 1987; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Stevenson and Baker, 1987; Ascher, 1988; Epstein and Dauber, 1991; Hickman et al., 1995; Zellman and Waterman, 1998). However, Fan and Chen (2001) propose that the academic performance of college students is unrelated to parental involvement.

Although parents have an important role in elementary education, new e-learning environments have further diversified the effects of parental involvement, parental involvement is more complicated than ever. This two-year study developed an e-Homebook System under Education Wheel Model (EWM) framework (Chen et al., 2007), which provided a teacher-parent-student communication interface through the internet. The system used a portfolio method to collect parental involvement data from the internet. Factors contributing to parental involvement in both traditional and virtual realms were then statistically analysed.

Data from 13 classes in five elementary schools were analysed to examine the relationships between family background and parental involvement and how parental involvement affects student learning performance. The following questions were addressed:

- 1 How are parents involved in home, school and virtual learning environments?
- 2 Do parents with different family backgrounds become involved in different ways? How does behaviour in virtual environments differ from that in traditional environments?
- 3 Are the measures of parental involvement associated with student learning performance? Are these associations distinguishable after considering characteristics of family background?

## **2 Literature review**

### *2.1 Parental involvement at school and home*

The traditional view analyses parental involvement in the context of school, but a broader framework also examines parental involvement in family. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) defined parental involvement as the expenditure of time and resources of parents on enhancing the educating of their children. Examples would include (a) monitoring behaviour at school or home: ensuring attendance, assisting with after school activities, homework assistance and school communication; (b) cognitive involvement: reading with children, arranging inspirational activities for children; (c) personally assisting the school in understanding the development of their children. Five other categories are parental expectations, a structure for home learning, educational communication between parents and schools, student-parent participation in school activities and parental participation in school decision-making (Epstein, 1987; Christenson, 1992; Epstein, 1995). Most research has focused on parental involvement within the school and at home. However, the process of establishing parental involvement is more important than how

the effect is evaluated. Few studies have included parental characteristics in the learning model. Chen et al. (2007) proposed an EWM which describes teachers, students and parents as essential components for student performance in an educational environment.

However, the internet has changed learning methods from an instructor-led approach to a real learner-centred approach. Interaction among participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences is now more learning-oriented in the virtual classroom. Methods of communication have also changed. Parents can now use new communication interface like email to get in touch with the teacher at anytime and anyplace wherever the internet service is available. The internet aspects of parent participation have not been observed or analysed. In the early stage of this research, an e-Homebook System was designed as a communication platform for teachers, students and parents.

### *2.1.1 e-Homebook System*

The e-Homebook System enables portfolio assessment in an e-learning environment. A portfolio system is used to observe and record parent participation behaviour through the web log, provide teachers a reference of portfolio information to evaluate participation performance and promote participation outcomes. In a previous study, the authors constructed the system framework and established the system prototype. In this research, EHS was used to observe the virtual involvement behaviour of parents.

The EHS is comprised five intelligent agents: interaction agent, instruction agent, information agent, evaluation agent and log agent. The instruction agent provides learning materials from teachers as from learning platform. The agents manage a learning portfolio conception, observe and record student e-learning behaviour through the web log and provide teachers with a reference of portfolio information. The agents adopt a trigger function to analyse the learning behaviour of students using the internet as well as in the classroom, evaluate overall performance then automatically send e-mail messages to teachers and parents to guide and assist students who need to revise their learning attitude. Similarly, agents record the participation portfolios of parents, and teachers can then draft a better communication strategy.

### *2.2 Rating of parental involvement*

The evaluation of parental involvement can be rated by students, teachers and parents themselves. However, the students may have negative reflections upon the parental involvement in school (Reynolds, 1992). We neglect the student recognition part and use the questionnaire to collect the parents' measurement of involvement in school and home. Since the EHS collects the parent's involvement on internet automatically, we evaluate the parental involvement in the two ways without teachers' rating. We evaluate parental involvement in different dimensions instead of being summed up into a general composite.

### *2.3 This study*

The past research in Taiwan showed that parents had positive and favourable attitude and high motivation to their involvement but teachers made slight efforts to encourage parental involvement. Parents attributed rather greater commitment to parental involvement

with the teachers (Krumm, 1996). Teachers' attitude and willingness to participation is a critical success factor in our two-year research. Teachers encourage parental involvement throughout the elementary school, with a firm family-school connection and then enhance the parental involvement, especially on internet participation.

### **3 Methods**

#### *3.1 Sample*

This study focused on the influence of parental participation in elementary education. Five elementary schools were selected in Tainan City, Tainan County and Kaohsiung City. The five schools were considered to use the e-Homebook System corporately. Since the elementary classes are combined every two years in Taiwan, an elementary school student would have new classmates in first, third and fifth grade. The study sample included 377 elementary students aged 6–13 years old from 13 classes from these three grades. The families of the participants were asked to complete questionnaires regarding their involvement. Excluding unreturned and incomplete questionnaires, 259 valid samples were retrieved. The online status in EHS is an optional participation, there are 127 valid users excluding teachers and system managers. That is, less than 50% of the sample families participated in the online experiment.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for family characteristics of the study sample. For example, 73% of the participants in the main school activities in the sample were female, 8.5% of participants were single parent, 54% had university degrees and 44% of the sample parents were 36–40 years old.

#### *3.2 Research design*

Parental involvement behaviours at school, home and online were separately examined in this study. The purpose of this study can be described in three stages: (a) What kind of family characteristics influence parental involvement? (b) What is the determinant variable? (c) Does parental involvement influence student learning performance?

#### *3.3 Parent characteristics*

Some research has demonstrated that attitude and self-recognition of parents are the determining factors affecting parental participation (Bandura, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). Some research has proposed that different family characteristics influence the level of parental involvement. Further, parental involvement differs according to gender, ethnic group, student age, parental education level and single parent status (Keith et al., 1998; Kohl et al., 2000). Parents' education is a substantial factor effect on children's literacy development directly and indirectly through other variables (Myrberg and Rosen, 2009). This study examined whether family characteristics such as income, gender of the more involved parent, occupation, age, education and status (single-parent or two-parent) influence parental involvement.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics on family characteristics

| Family background                                | Questionnaire        |            | Online |            | Online/tradition<br>involving ratio |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|--------|------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                                  | N                    | Percentage | N      | Percentage |                                     |
| Gender of primarily involved parent              | Male                 | 70         | 27.0%  | 28         | 22.0%                               |
|                                                  | Female               | 189        | 73.0%  | 99         | 78.0%                               |
| Family situation                                 | Single-parent family | 22         | 8.5%   | 9          | 7.1%                                |
|                                                  | Two-parent family    | 231        | 89.2%  | 117        | 92.1%                               |
|                                                  | Grandparent family   | 3          | 1.2%   | 0          | 0.0%                                |
|                                                  | Others               | 3          | 1.2%   | 1          | 0.8%                                |
|                                                  |                      |            |        |            | 33.3%                               |
| Education degree of primarily<br>involved parent | Elementary school    | 1          | 0.4%   | 0          | 0.0%                                |
|                                                  | Junior high school   | 9          | 3.5%   | 2          | 1.6%                                |
|                                                  | Senior high school   | 109        | 42.1%  | 54         | 42.5%                               |
|                                                  | Bachelor's degree    | 128        | 49.4%  | 66         | 52.0%                               |
|                                                  | Master's degree      | 7          | 2.7%   | 3          | 2.4%                                |
|                                                  | Doctoral degree      | 5          | 1.9%   | 2          | 1.6%                                |
|                                                  |                      |            |        |            | 40.0%                               |
| Occupation of primarily<br>involved parent       | Government employee  | 46         | 17.8%  | 29         | 22.8%                               |
|                                                  | Industry             | 34         | 13.1%  | 22         | 17.3%                               |
|                                                  | Commerce             | 50         | 19.8%  | 28         | 22.0%                               |
|                                                  | Service industry     | 56         | 21.6%  | 18         | 14.2%                               |
|                                                  | Agriculture          | 2          | 0.8%   | 1          | 0.8%                                |
|                                                  | Others               | 71         | 27.4%  | 29         | 22.8%                               |
|                                                  |                      |            |        |            | 40.8%                               |

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics on family characteristics (continued)

| <i>Family background</i>         | <i>Questionnaire</i> |                   | <i>Online</i> |                   | <i>Online/tradition<br/>involving ratio</i> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|
|                                  | <i>N</i>             | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>N</i>      | <i>Percentage</i> |                                             |
| Age of primarily involved parent | 25 and under         | 5                 | 1             | 0.8%              | 20.0%                                       |
|                                  | 26 to 30             | 11                | 7             | 5.5%              | 63.6%                                       |
|                                  | 31 to 35             | 43                | 26            | 20.5%             | 60.5%                                       |
|                                  | 36 to 40             | 114               | 57            | 44.9%             | 50.0%                                       |
|                                  | 41 to 45             | 61                | 24            | 18.9%             | 39.3%                                       |
|                                  | 46 and above         | 25                | 12            | 9.4%              | 48.0%                                       |
| Monthly family income            | 0 to 50,000          | 118               | 57            | 44.9%             | 48.3%                                       |
|                                  | 50,001 to 100,000    | 107               | 54            | 42.5%             | 50.5%                                       |
|                                  | 100,001 to 150,000   | 21                | 12            | 9.4%              | 57.1%                                       |
|                                  | 150,001 to 200,000   | 5                 | 1             | 0.8%              | 20.0%                                       |
|                                  | 200,000 and above    | 8                 | 3             | 2.4%              | 37.5%                                       |



### 3.4 Measures of home and school involvement of parents

A questionnaire survey was used to collect data regarding the primarily involved parent to rate their involvement at home and school. Parents evaluated themselves on a 5-point scale (5 = excellent/highly agree; 4 = above average/agree; 3 = satisfactory/no comment; 2 = fair/disagree and 1 = poor/very disagree). Home involvement includes the following activities (a) parenting: providing a good learning environment, nurturing children self-esteem ability, strengthen children's information application ability and training their foreign language ability and (b) learning at home: assisting children with studying and homework, examining homework, reviewing their grades, activity notification and discussing school life.

School activities included (a) communicating with the school: understanding the school behaviour of children, cooperating with teachers to strengthen learning efficiency, sharing opinions spontaneously with teachers and asking the school to provide feedback on the learning behaviour of their children; (b) volunteering at school: energetically participating in school activities, attending school open house, sports events and parent-class meeting; (c) decision-making in the school: assisting teacher with instructional activities, decorating and arranging classrooms, helping teachers in after school activities, volunteering at school affairs and collaborating with the community.

The following is a list of variables of portfolio analysis, the observation index of parent participation. Reverse questions were asked to check for inconsistent behaviour and to exclude invalid samples. Then all the scores rated by the parent were summed to get the involvement scale individually in both home involvement and school involvement. The higher the scores, the more attention they gave their children.

### 3.5 Measures of parent EHS involvement

Since the portfolio was a purposeful collection to show parental concern and efforts, the participation portfolio process established criteria for determining the actual contents of their portfolio and judging the contribution of their work. Some parents actively discussed with the teacher using EHS interface. The online behaviour was recorded by the EHS. Parents who regularly contacted the teachers had better discussions and deeper participation in school decision-making. Teachers could easily observe that family expectation and has participation produced a better relationship with the parent.

The following is the observation index of parent participation. The EHS records the time and frequencies for every system user. The system automatically sums each individual index and periodically reports to teachers. Teachers may adjust their communication strategy with parents.

Although each index is compatible, the total online involvement is not so easy to be evaluated. Times and frequencies were normalise to get relative scores, and then all scores were summed. Higher scores indicated more parental involvement online.

The units of measurement in the observation index, frequency and time span, must be normalised before making comparisons. The normalised values for the observation index are given by

$$Z_{i,j} = \left\{ \frac{x_{i,j} - \min(x_{i,j})}{\max(x_{i,j}) - \min(x_{i,j})}; j = 1 \text{ to } n \right\}; i = 1 \text{ to } m \quad (1)$$

where  $X_{ij}$  represents the observation index for the  $i$ -th parent at the  $j$ -th participating index,  $m$  and  $n$  indicate the total of participating parent and participating index, respectively. The  $Z_{ij}$  means the normalised value of the participating index for the  $i$ -th parent at the  $j$ -th index, i.e. the participating intensity, which is always between zero and one. The values for each parents are normalised.

A weighting factor is introduced to adjust the importance of the observation index. The corresponding weighted intensity of participation is as equation (2):

$$S_i = \sum W_j \times Z_{i,j}, \sum W_j = 1 \quad (2)$$

where  $S_i$  indicates the weighted intensity of participation for the  $i$ -th parent, and  $W_j$  represents the weighting factor. Therefore, the weighting factor for each index is assumed to be the same in this research, i.e.  $W_j = 1/n$ . This weighted intensity can later be used as a reference value in the statistical analysis.

**Table 2** Suggested observation index of parent participation in EHS

| <i>Observation index</i> | <i>Description</i>                     |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Logins                   | Frequencies and time span of using EHS |
| Mailing area             | Frequencies of reading email           |
|                          | Frequencies of sending email           |
| Discussing area          | Frequencies of posting articles        |
|                          | Frequencies of replying articles       |
| Announcement area        | Frequencies of posting articles        |
|                          | Frequencies of replying articles       |

### 3.6 Student learning performance

Educational success can be measured in different ways, including high test scores, concentration during class and obtaining higher academic degree. The relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement is stronger when academic achievement was represented by a more global indicator of academic achievement (e.g. GPA) than by an academic subject-specific indicator (e.g. math grade) (Fan and Chen, 2001). Grade point average is used to measure learning performance since it is easy to measure.

### 3.7 Data analysis

This study analysed parental involvement in three environments: home, school and online. Family characteristics were examined for associations with involvement type, and involvement type was examined for associations with learning performance.

Hierarchical linear regression analysis was performed in this study to examine associations between independent and dependent variables. The final model included three variables related to behaviour and family background factors. The ANOVA analysis was used to compare outcome variables for varying levels of student learning performance.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Factor analysis

Table 3 represents factor analysis of parental involvement behaviour after extracting five constructs. The cumulative percentage of variance was 62.69%, and the factor loading for every factor loading is 0.05. The five factors were learning assistance at home, volunteering at school, and decision-making at school, parenting and communicating with school. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was between 0.71 and 0.86, indicating the consistency for each factor in this questionnaire.

### 4.2 Correlation analysis

As stated in Table 4, gender, educational degree, occupation and age of the primary involver's family situation, family monthly income were not correlated with learning at home, volunteering at home, volunteering at school, decision-making at school, parenting or communication with school. However, the traditional involvement factors were highly correlated with each other. Conversely, the occupation and age of the primary involver's were significantly correlated with online involvement, but online involvement was not correlated with any of the traditional involvement behaviours.

### 4.3 ANOVA analysis between family background and parental involvement

#### 4.3.1 Gender and parental involvement

The gender of the primary parent was not associated with parental involvement since the Roy Greatest Root was equal to 0.029 in the ANOVA analysis. No gender differences were noted between school/home/online involvement behaviours.

#### 4.3.2 Family situation and parental involvement

Family situation was significantly associated with parental involvement according to ANOVA analysis. The Roy Greatest Root was equal to 0.047,  $p < 0.05$ . Families living with grandparents involve more in decision-making at school than one-parent or two-parent family.

#### 4.3.3 Education degree and parental involvement

The educational degree of the primary involver was significantly associated with parental involvement since the Roy Greatest Root was equal to 0.097, and  $p < 0.01$  in the ANOVA analysis. Parents with high-school degree tended to participate more in school decision-making than parents with college degree. Parents with junior-high-school degree cared more in their parenting behaviour than parents with college degree.

#### 4.3.4 Occupation and parental involvement

The occupation of the primary parent was significantly associated with parental involvement since the Roy Greatest Root was equal to 0.061,  $p < 0.1$  in the ANOVA analysis. Parents working in agricultural industries were more involved than parents working in other industries.

**Table 3** Factor analysis of parent involvement behaviour variables

| <i>Construct</i>            | <i>Variable</i>                                   | <i>Factor loading</i> | <i>Eigenvalue</i> | <i>Cumulative percent of variance</i> | <i>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></i> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Learning assistance at home | Assisting kids to practice homework               | 0.6408                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Assisting kids to review homework                 | 0.7710                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Notifying kids' grade report                      | 0.7631                | 7.3219            | 31.83%                                | 0.86008                               |
|                             | Minding school activity notifications             | 0.7545                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Discussing school life with kids                  | 0.5228                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Assisting kids to finish homework                 | 0.7590                |                   |                                       |                                       |
| Volunteering at school      | Assisting teacher's instructional activities      | 0.8065                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Assisting classroom decoration and arrangement    | 0.8758                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Assisting teachers in their after school teaching | 0.7479                | 2.8511            | 44.23%                                | 0.86162                               |
|                             | Volunteering to teacher non-instructing matters   | 0.6919                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Providing community resources                     | 0.5462                |                   |                                       |                                       |
| Decision-making at school   | Participating school activities                   | 0.6268                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Attending school open house                       | 0.7950                |                   |                                       |                                       |
|                             | Attending school athlete meeting                  | 0.7322                | 1.6439            | 51.38%                                | 0.80424                               |
|                             | Participating parent's association                | 0.7424                |                   |                                       |                                       |

**Table 3** Factor analysis of parent involvement behaviour variables (continued)

| Construct                 | Variable                                            | Factor loading | Eigenvalue | Cumulative percent of variance | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Parenting                 | Providing well home learning environment            | 0.6696         | 1.3866     | 57.41%                         | 0.74931             |
|                           | Nurturing kids living ability                       | 0.6490         |            |                                |                     |
|                           | Fostering kids information application ability      | 0.7167         |            |                                |                     |
|                           | Training kids foreign language ability              | 0.7977         |            |                                |                     |
| Communicating with school | Knowing kids school behaviour                       | 0.7799         | 1.2141     | 62.69%                         | 0.71193             |
|                           | Being cooperative with teacher                      | 0.6285         |            |                                |                     |
|                           | Sharing with teacher spontaneously                  | 0.6617         |            |                                |                     |
|                           | Willing to have feedback for kids' school behaviour | 0.4707         |            |                                |                     |

**Table 4** Correlations among key outcome and explanatory variables

| <i>Variable</i>                                 | 1      | 2      | 3        | 4        | 5       | 6        | 7       | 8       | 9       | 10      | 11    |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|----------|----------|---------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| 1 Gender of primarily involved parent           |        |        |          |          |         |          |         |         |         |         |       |
| 2 Family situation                              | 0.011  |        |          |          |         |          |         |         |         |         |       |
| 3 Education degree of primarily involved parent | -0.141 | 0.091  |          |          |         |          |         |         |         |         |       |
| 4 Occupation of primarily involved parent       | 0.120* | -0.044 | -0.310** |          |         |          |         |         |         |         |       |
| 5 Age of primarily involved parent              | -0.244 | 0.074  | 0.259**  | -0.117   |         |          |         |         |         |         |       |
| 6 Family monthly income                         | 0.098  | 0.075  | 0.259**  | -0.148   | 0.157** |          |         |         |         |         |       |
| 7 Learning at home                              | -0.084 | -0.001 | 0.029    | -0.04    | 0.094   | -0.085   |         |         |         |         |       |
| 8 Volunteering at school                        | -0.06  | -0.014 | -0.082   | -0.01    | -0.023  | -0.018   | 0.308** |         |         |         |       |
| 9 Decision-making at school                     | -0.1   | 0.03   | -0.143   | 0.042    | 0.035   | -0.220** | 0.401** | 0.539** |         |         |       |
| 10 Parenting                                    | 0      | 0.016  | -0.109   | 0.056    | 0.06    | -0.190** | 0.457** | 0.169*  | 0.342** |         |       |
| 11 Communicating with school                    | 0.042  | 0.004  | 0.016    | -0.068   | 0.103   | -0.138*  | 0.496** | 0.394** | 0.407** | 0.440** |       |
| 12 Parent's involvement online                  | 0.103  | 0.01   | 0.219**  | -0.249** | -0.038  | 0.019    | -0.047  | -0.104  | -0.105  | -0.065  | 0.008 |

Notes: \* $p < 0.1$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



#### 4.3.5 Age and parental involvement

Parent's age was significantly associated with parental involvement since the Roy Greatest Root was equal to 0.070,  $p < 0.01$  in the ANOVA analysis. Parents aged 25–30 years were more likely to volunteer at school than those 31–35 years old. Moreover, parents younger than 25 years old were less communicative with schools than other age groups. Parents aged 26–30 years were more involved online than those aged 31–35. Parents aged 31–35 were more involved online than those aged 36–40 years.

#### 4.3.6 Family monthly income and parental involvement

Family monthly income was significantly associated with parental involvement since the Roy Greatest Root was equal to 0.070,  $p < 0.01$  in the ANOVA analysis. Parents with family income less than NT\$ 50,000 were more likely to volunteer at school, participate in decision-making at school and exhibit parental involvement than any other income groups.

#### 4.3.7 Student learning performance and parental involvement

Different independent variables were combined to show the relationship between parent background, traditional involvement and online involvement to predict learning performance of students. As stated in Table 5 the  $F$  value in hierarchical regression analysis was 3.69,  $p < 0.001$  and  $R^2$  was 11.04% in Model 5, indicating this model provided the most convincing explanation. The educational degree of the primary involver, family income, communication with school and online involvement were more influential on children learning performance. That is, the higher the educational degree of the primary involver and the higher the family income, the higher the frequently of parent communication with the school and parent involvement in online activities, both show the better learning performance of children.

**Table 5** Hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting learning performance

| Variable                            | Model 1  | Model 2 | Model 3  | Model 4 | Model 5  |
|-------------------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|
| Family background                   |          |         |          |         |          |
| Gender of primarily involved parent | 1.128    |         | 1.003    | 0.625   | 0.508    |
| Education degree primarily involver | 3.508**  |         | 3.397*** | 3.285** | 3.195**  |
| Age of primarily involver           | −1.059   |         | −0.907   | −1.281  | −1.158   |
| Family monthly income               | 1.927*   |         | 2.045**  | 2.077** | 2.233**  |
| Traditional involvement             |          |         |          |         |          |
| Learning at home                    |          | −0.817  |          | −1.215  | −1.188   |
| Volunteering at school              |          | −0.369  |          | −0.496  | −0.6     |
| Decision-making at school           |          | −1.92*  |          | −1.104  | −0.972   |
| Parenting                           |          | 0.448   |          | 1.05    | 1.129    |
| Communicating with school           |          | 1.901*  |          | 1.824*  | 1.803*   |
| Virtual involvement                 |          |         |          |         |          |
| Parent's involvement online         |          | 2.076** | 2.137**  |         | 2.112**  |
| $R^2$                               | 7.90%    | 5.00%   | 9.50%    | 10.40%  | 12.00%   |
| Adj- $R^2$                          | 6.50%    | 2.80%   | 7.80%    | 7.10%   | 8.40%    |
| $F$ value                           | 5.495*** | 2.222** | 5.341*** | 3.20**  | 3.366*** |

Notes:  $p < 0.1$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

## **5 Discussion and recommendations**

### *5.1 Discussion*

#### *5.1.1 Family background and student learning performance*

The educational degree of the primary involver and the monthly family income were two determinant factors in student learning performance. Well-educated parents paid more attention to the education of their children and children were more effective in problem solving. Higher family income enables children take more after school courses.

#### *5.1.2 Traditional parental involvement and student learning performance*

Communicating with schools was the only traditionally influential factor in learning performance. Parents who are highly aware of how their children behave at school tend to cooperate with teachers to improve learning effectiveness, discuss children problems with school immediately and request notification of activities of children will make better learning outcome for their children. Many studies have made similar conclusion that parents participate in children's study activity and school activity contribute to progress (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997).

#### *5.1.3 Online parental involvement and student learning performance*

Parents who frequently use E-Homebook System to review the teaching materials, browse the announcement and discuss with other parents, show positive attitude to participate in children's life. Therefore, parents can detect the problems faced by their children in school and search for immediate support. Parents should assist their children in learning and school activities to enhance their future development (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). Parents may use e-Homebook System as an alternate to telephone, school visits or paper homework since the internet is available anytime, anyplace and in any device.

### *5.2 Summary*

The economic development of Taiwan has enabled the country to enter the industrial and commercial age. The ratio of female labour force is higher than ever because of family economic pressures. Children go to after school care or supplemental education to enhance their competitive ability. The topic of family conversation is more likely to be academic life rather than opinion interchange. Many studies of parental participation in children education have examined ways to improve learning. What children need is not only academic grades but also activities with comprehensive participation. When parents participate in school activities, children feel more understood and supported.

Because traditional involvement may be unrealistic for busy working parents, online involvement is a viable alternative. The internet learning environment enables multimedia interaction and communication. The E-Homebook System provides a new approach to parental involvement in internet learning. Parents can discuss and share information with other parents. The parent-children relationship is improved.

### *5.3 Recommendations*

#### *5.3.1 Recommendations to government authorities*

Facing the challenge of PISA 2012 digital assessment, Taiwan educational system is forced to speed up the preparations for the digital learning and assessment era. Since online involvement positively influences the learning performance of children, the government should construct a network infrastructure which eliminates the poverty gap. Visits to numerous elementary schools in association with this research revealed that most parents in urban areas have computers and internet access at home. Urban teachers should build class websites which provide class information, course information, photographs, etc. However, many parents, particularly in rural areas, do not have computers. Schools still have insufficient computers for students and parents.

Therefore, the government should provide public network resources such as community web areas, library internet access and even mobile hotspot areas. Parents who do not have personal computers can use public resources to surf the net. The government should also encourage e-learning web providers to build Integrated Learning Net Services which include not only textbook knowledge, but also pluralistic information as general knowledge of life, medical general knowledge, ecological knowledge and travel tips, etc. Students and parents can acquire knowledge, which was once time-consuming to be collected but easily available at any time at any place now.

#### *5.3.2 Recommendations to schools*

The education funds in Taiwan are decreasing gradually every year. Most of the funds are allocated for higher education, which reduces funding for elementary education. However, in all the participating schools in this study, limited funding did not always mean limited resources. Some school principals were very aggressive in parenthood/community activities and very successful in pursuing project funds from different institutions. These funds are beneficial for educating students. School directors should pay more attention to organising social resources and set promotion policy to attract parents regardless of their gender, income, occupation, age, family situation and participation frequency.

Faculty should also strengthen their information technology input such as computer labs, network services and make periodic education training. The information gap occurs not only because of hardware shortage, but also due to the mental resentment. The elementary school, as a basic education unit, should take responsibility for community re-education of students, parents and faculty. Parents are usually pleased to participate in the school activities including open house, athletic meeting, and parent association, to volunteer in helping teacher's instructional activities, decorate classroom, provide community resource, give overall assistance and share their opinions with school since they are part of the joint education force (Sun, 2007).

The third recommendation is to provide a school web which contains individual e-Homebook System for every class. A supportive school system is needed to encourage involvement. Unfortunately, many school personnel do not have adequate education to bridge the gap between home and school (Barnard, 2004). An online system is a good alternative method of communication for teachers and parents. The information department of elementary schools can implement an e-Homebook System for the whole school so that the teachers are not burdened with system maintenance and other technical

problems. Teachers can easily announce and discuss with the whole class and parents. Working parents are able to maintain the home-school connection without taking time off from work.

By constructing this e-learning platform, the web enables information sharing but also provides a group knowledge platform including learning materials to share between class, parents' announcement and multi-topic discussion area to share between groups. School activities or conferences can be recorded and played synchronously or asynchronously in this e-learning system. Each school member identifies himself in this shareware by contributing his knowledge, opinion, images and activity participation. Parents may become more involved in school affairs in this way.

### *5.3.3 Recommendations to parents*

Parents provide their children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the current educational system (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu, 2002). Parents embedded their knowledge, skills, education and advantage to their children a higher status in society. Parents participate more actively in the education of their children, the children learn more effectively, for example providing more books at home, activating more intellectual work, earlier literacy activities. Children studying alone may lose their ability to interact and share with others, especially in elementary level. Parents are the first partners in their study. This study found that if parents participate more actively in the education of their children, the children learn more effectively. Children can form a good attitude towards study under aggressive education attitudes of their parents. For example, parents may guide children in making study plans and strategy, study automatic and spontaneous, study routinely and prepare for tests well in advance. Parents who participate in the education-related activities of their children can instill a positive attitude towards studying. But less interfering is better than excessive interfering. All parents have to be aware of the fact that children are the key character in education. Parents are not able to force them or substitute them to study.

Finally, we recommend that parents build a well-functioning family. Most parents do their best to provide best facilities for their young ones. However, according to some educational experts, the best family is one with warm and close relationships. Families provide children not only with material needs but also a supportive shelter. Parents must build a family where the kid receives a safe and close family atmosphere, healthy custom, imitable models, induction the best part of children, specialty finding and emotional comfort. Parents involving in children's life with love may endow them with a more satisfactory life.

## **6 Conclusions**

### *6.1 Contributions*

The major contribution of this study is the comparison of online parental involvement compared with traditional home and school involvement behaviour. This study revealed a significant association between online parental involvement and student learning performance. Therefore, elementary schools should provide an online communication interface for parents and faculty. Parents may be involved in different activities and find

the best time allocation choice. If parental involvement can make a significant difference in the educational success of these children, one would expect that the differences would be evident in other families.

### *6.2 Strengths*

This study discriminates parental involvement in several activities and investigates each activity with different family characteristics. Using a theory driven model, most of the characteristics that the literature suggests are associated with parental involvement and the outcomes were included in the analyses to control their influence.

We also found an interesting result. Many studies mention that educational resources significantly differ between rural and urban areas, and learning performance varies accordingly. However, we cannot conclude that parental involvement differed between rural and urban schools. Sample school in remote district was found to be very aggressive in integrating community resources. As Henderson and Berla (1994) suggested, the most effective school results are achieved when parents, especially those in low-income communities, institutionalise the involvement of their members to support and participate the public schools as an element of their local culture.

### *6.3 Limitations*

Like many other studies, this analysis has its own limitations. Since only a few parents participated in the e-Homebook System, due to the lack of variation, no significant associations were found between parent characteristics and online parental involvement. The second limitation is that attitudes of teachers were not controllable in this study, especially that regarding online behaviour. The quality and quantity of teacher participation behaviour in this study was very complex. This important component should also be investigated. The third limitation is the lack of follow-up evaluations and use of longitudinal data. We can trace the association between early parental involvement and the future success of children.

### *6.4 Summary*

The issues in the pattern of parental involvement and the influence on student learning performance focused on the educational environment. The internet not only changes the way people communicate but also offers different way of learning. Constructing an online learning environment makes parents, teachers and students interact each other, such as parents to teachers, students to teachers and students to students, more easily and quickly without time and location limit. Previous researchers have addressed learning through internet and online communication, but the relevant application form and effect of these issues still need further discussion.

This work has proposed an e-Homebook System, which cooperates with 377 families in three counties in southern Taiwan. Our results indicated the parent online participation behaviour by EHS and used questionnaire to collect parent actual participation behaviour. Statistical software was used to analyse how parental background influences behaviour and how parental participation behaviour influences the learning performance of their children.

# Learning from the COVID-19 home-schooling experience: Listening to pupils, parents/carers and teachers

Improving Schools

2020, Vol. 23(3) 209–222

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DOI: 10.1177/1365480220958797

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## Abstract

In Spring 2020, schools in many countries had to close in response to the COVID-19 virus pandemic and move to remote teaching. This paper explores the views of pupils, parents/carers and teachers of 'home-school' in one Norwegian municipality, gathered through parallel online surveys in April 2020 during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdown period. It finds that adaptation happened very quickly and that home-school was well received by pupils and parents. There was more creative learning, better progress, more useful feedback and greater student independence. School leaders reported that they wanted to implement changes based on the experience of remote learning enforced by the lockdown, so that the crisis has become an opportunity for grassroots innovation.

## Keywords

COVID-19, home-schooling, school improvement, student voice

## Education during the school lockdown in Spring 2020

In Spring 2020, schools in many countries faced unprecedented challenges resulting from the COVID-19 virus pandemic. School closures at short notice created severe disruption, and head-teachers had to mobilise staff to teach remotely with little preparation or training time. Concern about the impact on pupil progress was widespread, with fears that home-schooling would widen the attainment gap between children from poor homes and those from more affluent backgrounds. Research (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020) found that children from the poorest families were the least likely to have access to the devices needed and internet access at home.

School leaders were faced with the task of handling crisis situations beyond any existing scope of their role. They had to be a source of support to parents, governors, staff and their senior

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leadership teams, and were put in the position of making decisions, and giving advice and guidance, even when they had limited information and solutions were in any case unclear. The change that the pandemic caused has affected and impaired the systems and processes that school leaders are accustomed to use in order to lead and manage organisational performance, and it has created barriers to existing mechanisms for providing moral, social, personal and professional support and motivation (Alevizou, 2020) to their staff. Many teachers voiced concerns about the pressure that had been placed upon them (Comanducci, 2020). They were concerned about difficulties caused by their unfamiliarity with how to deliver high quality teaching and learning remotely, without the immediate verbal and non-verbal feedback that the classroom offers.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)'s rapid evidence assessment on remote learning (2020), albeit largely based on other (non-pandemic) situations, concluded that:

- Teaching quality is more important than how lessons are delivered
- Ensuring access to technology is key, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
- Peer interactions can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes
- Supporting pupils to work independently can improve learning outcomes
- Different approaches to remote learning suit different tasks and types of content

The sudden shift from classroom-based to remote learning had a significant effect on the uses of educational technology in schooling (Patel et al., 2020), requiring swift adaptation by teachers and pupils to the features of the digital platforms thrust upon them (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020; Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020). National and local education systems with a technology focus established home learning and virtual learning environments quickly. Those who already utilised digital learning platforms had fewer barriers to remote education compared with schools that had formerly made little use of technology or where pupils did not have devices and the internet at home (Petrie et al., 2020). Research in England (NFER, 2020) concluded that schools which had already established a virtual learning environment had higher student engagement levels than those without, especially for disadvantaged children.

Pupils should be co-participants in their own education (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018). Democracy and participation are among the core principles in the 2020 Norwegian national curriculum, which states that 'children should experience that they are listened to in the daily life of school, that they have real influence and that they can affect that which concerns them' (UDIR, 2019). Research on student participation (Jones & Bubb, 2020) found that teachers found it hard to involve pupils fully, particularly in issues impacting on school improvement. Research for the OECD found that 'an increase in the autonomy of pupils to manage their own learning' was an unexpected benefit of home-school (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020, p. 18).

Research in Norway, as in many places, found positives in the crisis. Gudmundsdottir and Hathaway (2020, p. 244) reported teachers being positive and 'willing to go the extra mile'. A national survey (Federici & Vika, 2020) found that the majority of teachers reported that they had been able to continue providing teaching and learning, that they had good contact with pupils and parents, and that 85% of municipalities reported that they had been able to continue to provide a good and safe learning environment. A survey of primary school teachers (Larsen, 2020) showed that 73% had more time to plan lessons. To our knowledge, there has not been other research in Norway which has involved all the different stakeholders at the same time during the home-school period and has sought the views of pupils of all ages, including the youngest. It is this gap that our research aims to fill.

There is a potential for good things to be achieved in response to the pandemic. As Schleicher suggests, 'it is about looking seriously and dispassionately at good practice in our own countries

and elsewhere to become knowledgeable about what works' (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020, p. 5). It is in this spirit that we share research about home-school that was conducted in Norway and contributes something particularly interesting: rather than seeing home-school as a deficit model, our research considers what can be learned and taken forward.

## Context

The research took place in a municipality in the Norwegian fjords, which has eight schools: five primary (*barneskole* for pupils aged 6 to 12), one lower secondary (*ungdomsskole* for pupils aged 12 to 16) and two all-through schools. As part of the national lockdown response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, schools in Norway were closed to all but keyworkers' children from 13 March, with pupils in Grades 1 to 4 returning from 27 April and Grades 5 to 10 from 11 May 2020 (year-groups are referred to as Grades 1 to 10, corresponding respectively to ages 6 to 16). This early return was possible because infection levels were low by international standards.

Norway, per capita, is one of the richest countries in the world. It is the second highest spender on school education in the OECD (2020), but it is only middle ranking in PISA tables (OECD, 2018). This is not to suggest that Norwegian schools are inadequate by international standards; many would argue that PISA does not reflect the breadth and qualities of the Norwegian curriculum and education system. However, achievement in the municipality where the research took place hovers at or just below average in Norway's national tests and examinations. In general, Norway's schools were better equipped with technology than many other countries: 93% of Norwegian pupils attended 'digitalised schools' compared with the EU average of 35% (European Commission, 2019).

The research was initiated by Sara Bubb, who had supported school development in the municipality as a freelance consultant from London for several years to help them raise student achievement. She had conducted a survey of all pupils in Grades 3 to 10 at the start of the academic year (September 2019), which showed that many of their views about school were negative: just over half disliked lessons in most subjects, finding them boring, text-book driven, slow-paced and teacher-dominated. To address this, she helped the schools implement some project-based learning. Evaluations showed that pupils liked this: they felt more engaged when learning outdoors, working in a cross-curricular way, and doing real-world and purposeful activities – all widely valued in the new Norwegian national curriculum to be implemented from August 2020, which placed an increased emphasis on creativity, participation and student voice.

However, the fear was that the progress in more creative teaching that had been made between September and March would be halted by the move to remote learning. It was in this context that the suggestion of rapidly conducted research that gathered opinions from pupils, parents/carers and teachers found strong support. The survey proposal was agreed, funded and links sent out by the municipality: the data were owned by Sara Bubb and the views expressed in this paper are exclusively those of the authors. Mari-Ana Jones collaborated on the research. An English and Norwegian speaker based at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, she was able to appreciate the subtleties of the survey comments and brought understanding of the policy context.

## Methodology

The aim of the research was to find how parents, teachers and pupils (1st–10th Grade, ages 6–16) in a Norwegian municipality experienced home-school and what, if anything, they wanted to continue with after schools reopened. Our research questions were therefore:

- How did pupils, parents/carers and teachers experience home-schooling?
- What did school leaders plan to change as a result of the home-schooling experience?

Key areas that related to ongoing work in the municipality were probed by asking participants to respond to statements with agreement ratings using a four-point Likert scale from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’; each had space for optional comments. The areas were digital learning; creative learning; pupil participation; progress; achievement; feedback; groupwork; parent-teacher relationships; and parents’ ability to help children.

The approach was to involve as many individuals as possible, rather than to select any sample (Fowler, 2009). It was important to gather views of all the key stakeholders within the schools to see how their views compared and related to each other so we designed four surveys: one for parents, one for teachers and two for pupils. We considered it important to give all year groups the opportunity to participate. Younger children might be considered too immature to answer a digital survey (Lumby, 2012), but we were keen to include their views, particularly as one might imagine that they would be worst affected by the move to remote learning. To limit the demands on the younger ones, we designed a shorter survey for pupils in Grades 1 to 4, with eight questions. There were 14 questions for pupils in Grades 5 to 10, teachers and parents.

Much thought was put into survey construction (Stoop et al., 2010). The questionnaires were designed to be easy and quick to complete in Norwegian, to help maximise the response rate. A key intention was to produce data which could be compared between groups so analogous statements were tailored as appropriate for each of the different groups. For instance, pupils in Grades 1 to 4 were asked how much they agreed with the statement, *I’ve become better at using an iPad/computer when I’m doing schoolwork*; and those in Grades 5 to 10, *I’ve become better at using digital tools when I’m doing schoolwork*. Parents/carers were asked how much they agreed with the statement, *My child/children have become better at using digital tools*. Teachers were asked to say how much they agreed with the statement, *I have become more adept at using digital tools during home-schooling*. In each case, a four-point Likert scale was used, ranging from ‘totally agree’ to ‘totally disagree’. Furthermore, respondents were given the option to comment on each statement, and many took the opportunity to do so. Teachers, parents and pupils in Grade 5 to 10 were also asked one open question, which was ‘What lessons can schools learn from the experience of home-school?’.

Ethical issues were carefully considered and addressed. We were particularly sensitive to making demands at a time when people were anxious about the Covid-19 virus and the lockdown. Although the number of cases and deaths in Norway was comparatively small, at the end of April the impact in the UK and neighbouring Sweden was devastating. Adults were under new pressures including the demands of working from home, while supervising their children’s education. To ensure that all respondents felt comfortable in completing them, all surveys were anonymous and voluntary. The only demographic data asked for from pupils and parents/carers were the name of their school and year group; teachers were asked to identify the school they worked in and which of three broad age bands (Grades 1–4, 5–7 and 8–10) they taught.

The whole process met the requirements of the General Data Protection Requirements (GDPR). Sara Bubb sent links to anonymous online questionnaires to the municipality who then passed them via heads and teachers to all pupils, their parents/carers and teachers. The surveys were completed over 9 days from 22 April to 1 May 2020, while schools were closed to all but the children of keyworkers: that is, after a little over 1 month of home-school. After data cleaning there were 1,995 responses (see Table 1). Engagement with the questionnaires was impressive, and respondents demonstrated that they had a lot to share.

The data were analysed by question to evaluate the extent to which percentages in each group agreed or disagreed with each statement, and we analysed the comments to help us to understand

**Table 1.** Responses to the surveys.

| Surveys            | Number of respondents  | Survey open         | Response rate |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Teachers           | 151                    | 22 April–1 May 2020 | 76%           |
| Parents            | 779, with 1,048 pupils | 22 April–1 May 2020 | 64%           |
| Pupils 6–9 years   | 320                    | 22 April–1 May 2020 | 49%           |
| Pupils 10–16 years | 745                    | 22 April–1 May 2020 | 69%           |
| School leaders     | 15                     | 15–19 June 2020     | 75%           |
| <i>Total</i>       | <i>2010</i>            |                     |               |

the reasons. Translation software was used, with its output reviewed by Mari-Ana Jones. We compared the analogous questions across groups and age ranges to see how the perspectives of pupils, parents/carers and teachers varied. The comments were analysed thematically within each grade on the Likert scales: this gave a deeper insight. For instance, we found that most of the respondents who disagreed that parent-teacher relations have improved had done so because they felt that relationships were already very good; that is, a superficial cause for concern was in fact a very high satisfaction rating.

The initial findings were explored in online meetings with the municipality and school leaders and summarised in a written report (Bubb & Jones, 2020). After the schools re-opened, we sought the views of school leaders about what changes they might make arising from the home-schooling experience. This was done through a survey, which was open within a short window of 15 to 19 June 2020, after pupils had been back at school for about a month. It was sent by the municipality to all those people with any leadership role in the eight schools; there were 15 responses. It gathered no demographic information such as the name of the respondent's school, to ensure anonymity for this small group of prominent local people.

## Findings

### *Technology*

The municipality had invested heavily in technology and all schools had already established some digital learning before the home-school period began. All pupils had a tablet or laptop, and were used to using them in lessons. Teachers had laptops and had received training and support in the use of digital resources. Microsoft *Teams* video-conferencing software had started to be used before the coronavirus crisis and proved to be a popular platform for online learning as well as for meetings.

Two-fifths of teachers and pupils agreed that they had become better at using digital tools during the home-school period. Those who did not agree commented that this was because they already had strong skills. The claimed improvement was greatest amongst the younger pupils: 88% of pupils in Grades 1 to 4 either agreed (35%) or strongly agreed (53%) that they had become better at using technology for learning. This aggregate total of 88% compared to 77% of pupils in Grades 5 to 10.

Similarly, 54% of teachers strongly agreed, and a further 26% agreed, that they had become better at using technology, with the biggest improvement coming from those who taught the youngest pupils. One teacher reflected on how challenging it had been at first:

The start-up was really hard with high expectations and pressure from all sides. We were overwhelmed with suggestions for apps, links, websites, etc. That made me feel like I wasn't doing anything well enough and that everyone else was doing something much better and more modern.

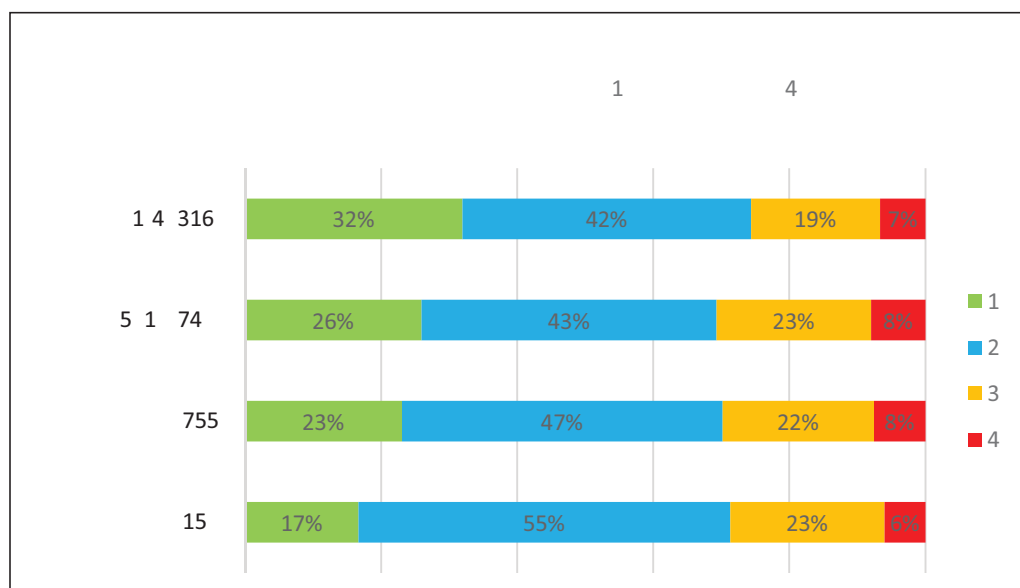


**Figure 1.** Responses from pupils, parents/carers and teachers about creative tasks in home-school.

There was support from advisers and technicians at the municipality, who organised extra equipment and fixed problems, so that by the time of the survey, pupils, parents/carers and teachers had experienced how digital solutions could facilitate everyday school life, such as daily online class meetings as well as one-to-one contact with pupils. Teachers and school leaders held meetings and training online, and this was considered to be an efficient use of time because there was no time spent in travelling.

School leaders completed a further survey in mid-June, 5 weeks after schools reopened, about their plans. All wanted to continue the progress made in using technology, and specifically to undertake the following:

- Digital meetings with staff, parents/carers and other agencies
- Use of digital tools in student feedback
- Use of digital tools for differentiation in teaching
- Increasing digital competence among teachers and pupils
- Using digital tools for vulnerable pupils and those who cannot attend school.

They were each at a different stage of implementing changes, with most saying that they had started making them, and some having already established them. As one leader said, 'We use digital tools in every year group, but it's important to think about when it's useful and when other methods are more useful'.

### *Creative teaching*

Given the emphasis in the municipality on improving teaching and motivating learners, we wanted to find out whether pupils had experienced any creative activities. As Figure 1 shows, about 70% of pupils agreed that more creative tasks had taken place at home-school than normal, with most enthusiasm being shown by the youngest pupils. Digital escape rooms, migratory bird photography and experiments in science were mentioned by pupils as some of the activities they enjoyed. One



cross-curricular task was to go outside and mark out the dimensions of a Bronze Age longhouse (about  $7 \times 20$  m), mark the fireplace in the middle, and share photographs of the results by uploading them. We were surprised that teachers were able to facilitate more creative tasks than usual during the home-schooling period. A teacher explained: 'I have much more time to plan, create relevant tasks, and to provide feedback'. Less time was spent on class management.

Leaders agreed that in the future they wanted pupils to experience more creative and practical tasks within and across subjects; exploratory teaching methods and assignments; use of nature and outdoor areas; and more student involvement in ways of working. They were at different stages of implementing the changes for this: a third were already making more use of outdoor learning.

## Feedback

We wanted to know about pupils' experiences with feedback from their teachers: it was easy to assume that it might be severely limited without classroom contact. This was not borne out, however. Pupils in Grades 5 to 10 were asked to rate how much they agreed with the statement, '*Feedback from teachers has helped me more than usual*' in three subjects, Norwegian, English and Mathematics. Two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed that they received feedback in each subject that helped more than usual. Several said they felt teachers had more time for feedback.

Digital communication seemed to provide new opportunities for all pupils to be seen and heard. One student said, 'teachers get to see how good all the pupils are, and not just those who always raise their hands in class'. Parents/carers were also positive about feedback from teachers, although many said that they found it hard to know how much was given normally. Just over half of the teachers also agreed that they gave more useful feedback than usual. One said 'I have probably commented on more assignments per student than normal. I have probably also divided my attention more fairly between the pupils, as all pupils are now "shouting" equally loudly'.

## Progress

We were interested in whether progress would be made by pupils during home-school, or whether they would be merely kept occupied, so we gave pupils the statement, 'I've learned a lot of new things at home school to rate (1 = totally agree, 4 = totally disagree)'. The majority of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that they had: 79% of pupils in the 1st to 4th Grades and 65% of pupils in the 5th to 10th Grades. Some examples that they gave were 'Getting better at reading in both Norwegian and English', 'I have learned to measure and cook good food' and 'Flowers, insects, getting better at reading'. However, 34% of pupils in Grades 5 to 10 and 21% in Grades 1 to 4 believed that they had not learned many new things, some saying that tasks were simple and repetitive.

We asked whether pupils did more schoolwork at home than they usually did at school: 62% of pupils in Grades 5 to 10 agreed that they had (Figure 2). Reasons given were that they could concentrate better at home. Some pupils said they received more work and were expected to complete it. Those who thought they had done less work said they were more motivated at school. Teachers thought that pupils' work varied depending on parental support and monitoring. One said, 'The difference between pupils' learning outcomes has been greater than in normal school'.

As in many countries, there has been particular concern about vulnerable pupils during home-schooling (Andrew et al., 2020; Green, 2020; Outhwaite, 2020). In our survey, 90% of teachers considered that they had catered well for this group. One teacher wrote,

We have done A LOT to adapt for the vulnerable. Some pupils have received video meetings several times a day. Teachers have been available to both pupils and guardians from 08.00-15.30 every day, and at times

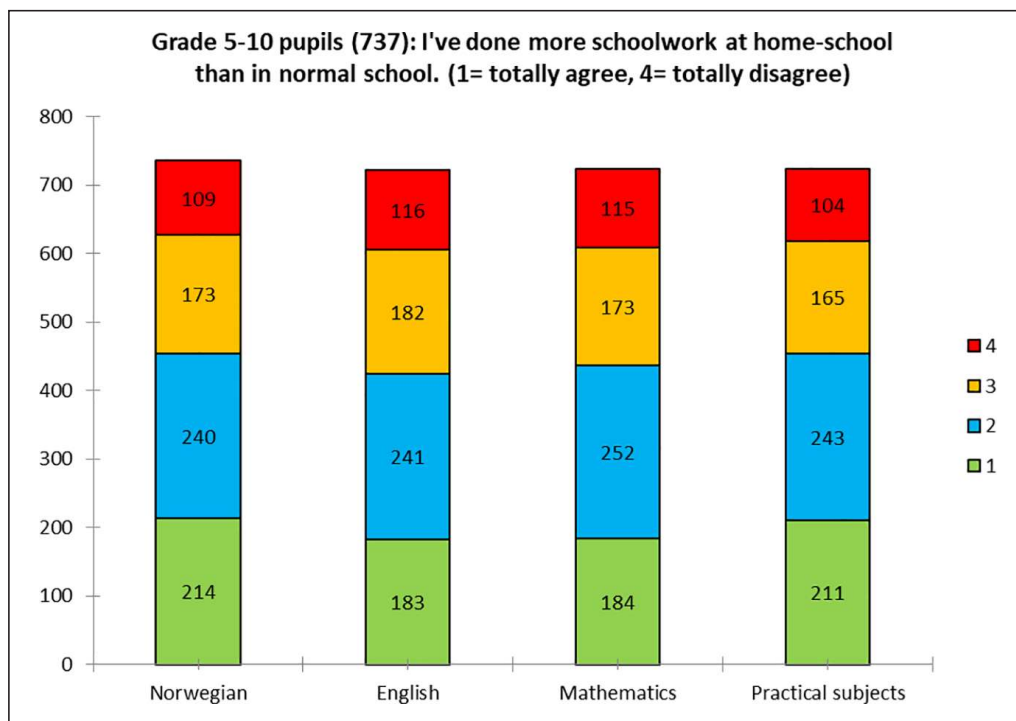


**Figure 2.** Pupils' views about whether they had done more work in home-school than normal.

far beyond working hours. Children who have expressed too little follow-up at home have been contacted specifically every day. Children with multilingual homes have been contacted every day and have had all the information read as audio files.

Another said that vulnerable pupils 'have never received such close follow-up:-)'. Teachers spoke of having a great deal of contact with parents/carers, as well as with colleagues and relevant services. Parents/carers and teachers reported that many vulnerable pupils performed better at home than with the distractions of the classroom.

### *Pupil independence*

In our research, 63% of pupils in Grades 5 to 10 said that they experienced more influence over their learning in home-school. The explanations from pupils included the suggestion that they had more choices in their ways of working and ordering assignments. They reported increased influence in how they organised their learning and the ways in which they solved tasks. However, one said, 'In gym we get to do what we want to do, so that's good, but we don't get to decide things in other subjects'.

There was consensus among the groups that pupils became more independent during home-school: 74% of teachers, 64% of parents, 71% of Grade 1 to 4 pupils and 78% of Grade 5 to 10 pupils agreed. They described experiencing a sense of ownership and increased motivation by taking responsibility for their own routines and their own learning. One said, 'I've been able to manage by figuring things out and fixing things'. Another said, 'Yes I have! There's no teacher hanging over your shoulder and telling you what you're going to do. When it's home-school, you decide quite a lot yourself. What you want to do and stuff and how much you put into it'. Comments from pupils who disagreed said that they had been independent even before home-school. A small



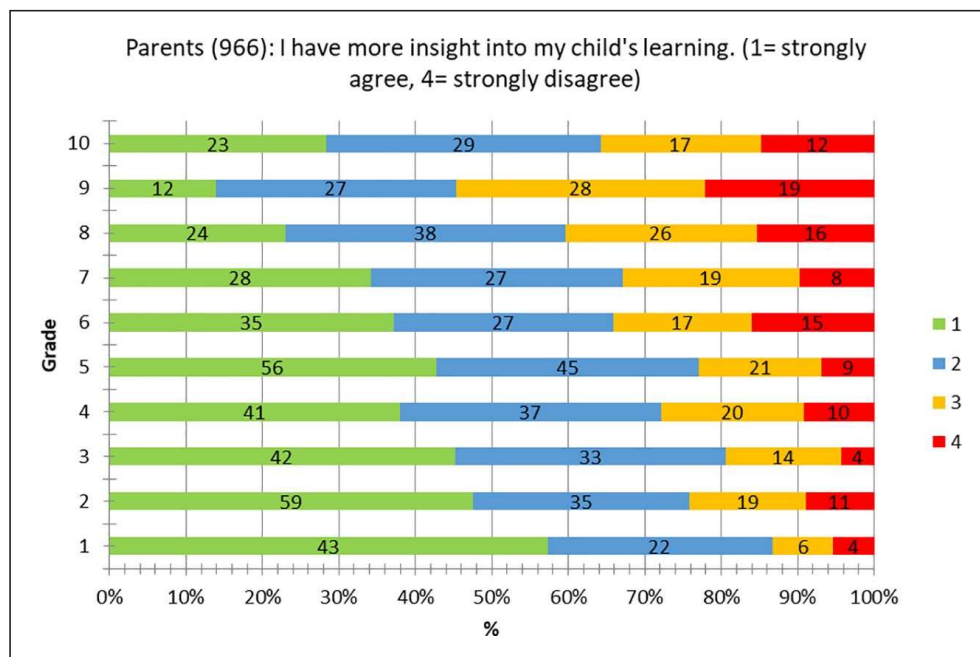


**Figure 3.** Parents' increased insight into their children's learning, by grade.

number of parents/carers commented however that their children had become overly dependent on them. Some teachers were particularly worried about this: one said, 'when I look at spelling and sentence structure, it's not the student's work'.

## Parents

Parental involvement increased during home-school. They gained more knowledge about their children's learning, and they had opportunities to play a more important role than before. Two-thirds of parents/carers reported gaining more insight into their children's learning: as Figure 3 shows, this was across all year groups, although most positive with the younger pupils, with 87% of parents/carers with children in Grade 1 agreeing. It is interesting that 64% of parents/carers of the oldest pupils also agreed that they had more insight, when the pre-conception might be that Grade 10 pupils would be less inclined to involve their parents/carers in their learning. One said, 'as parents, we have been able to contribute insights, reflections and good discussions in the various subjects. And to some extent helped to achieve the best possible result on the submission tasks'. Another parent said, 'This is one of the things we've appreciated the most. Now we know so much more and it's awesome positive!' Over half felt that they were in a better position to help their children with schoolwork.

Comments suggested that parents/carers had good relationships with teachers already, but about half believed that this improved during home-schooling. This was particularly true of parents/carers with younger children. One said, 'Fantastic teachers in this class who are just a phone call away if we as guardians are wondering about something! Can't praise them enough! They are also always available to pupils via chat and video, and respond quickly to all inquiries'.

Teachers also thought relationships with parents/carers were better: 72% of the teachers of the younger pupils (Grade 1–4) agreed that they had improved, compared with 38% of the older ones (Grade 8–10). Many teachers said that relations were good already. One teacher wrote, 'I experience GREAT gain in that we have had a unique dialogue with guardians. They are much more

engaged, showing more understanding of the child's challenges, ability to concentrate etc and some have actually realised the child masters much more than they had envisioned'. All the school leaders who responded to our survey planned to have more regular communication with parents/carers about pupils' learning and to use digital tools to do so.

## **Discussion**

As we explained in the context section, the concern was that the progress in more creative teaching that had been made between September and March would be halted by the move to remote learning. However, the results show that this did not happen: indeed, there was an acceleration in the move to make learning more motivating for pupils.

Our research agreed with the EEF's rapid evidence assessment on remote learning (2020). The thorough work on the introduction of digital tools and training that the municipality had done prior to COVID-19 was crucial to the success of home-schooling, which found favour with pupils of all ages, parents and teachers. It cannot be said whether the new learning delivery mechanisms led to better or worse progress, but the most salient observation is the degree to which rapid adaptation to a comprehensive e-learning environment was possible. Following the lockdown, in June 2020 the Norwegian government announced increased funding for schools to continue developing digital competencies among teachers and pupils (Ministry of Education and Research (Norway), 2020). In contrast, school systems without such advanced digital technology policies have 'left many children without the tools they need to access and benefit from remote learning' (Turvey & Pachler, 2020).

Some unforeseen dividends arose. For example, some teachers reported a reduction in some aspects of their workload, enabling them to devote more attention to pupils; students felt they gained a fairer share of teacher attention; and feedback improved. Our research has differed from the EEF's in that it has shown the important part that parents/carers played and in giving them a deeper insight into their child's learning. With even better relationships with teachers, parents/carers are in a much stronger position to contribute to pupil learning. Many vocalised greater admiration for teachers and that can be a force for school improvement.

The schools studied had the foundations in place to manage this unusual situation, and perhaps even more importantly have the resources necessary to build on their positive experiences in the future. They were well-resourced; local government and education administrators were able to play a constructive part; and there was a high degree of digital literacy and good online infrastructure in the area. The technology was a vital foundation stone, but our research suggests that teachers raised their game during the home-schooling period. Many teachers planned creative activities that engaged pupils, and thus established a good starting point for the new Norwegian national curriculum, which refers to the 'joy of learning' created through the connection between creativity, learning and development (UDIR, 2019). Education was personalised in a way that it had not been in the classroom.

Teachers' feedback was seen as more useful during home-school than normal, which is an important but surprising finding given that one would assume there would be severe practical obstacles in setting up the necessary dialogue to constitute effective feedback. These pedagogically desirable interactions seemed to work better than ever, which was unexpected. Parents/carers made a considerable contribution to learning, not only by helping their children but also by being an additional audience for the teachers' feedback, which might have motivated the latter yet further. The survey responses from the school leaders about their future plans were overwhelmingly positive, indicating that they felt motivated to make lasting changes to continue to improve feedback to pupils and keep parents/carers better informed.

The considerable response rate, together with the detail provided in many of the comments, has provided rich insights into the experience. Whilst one reason for the high response rate may be because of Sara Bubb's role as a known outsider, the level of detail in the optional comments indicates that people had things to say and wanted to be heard. Completing the survey away from school may have contributed to pupils and teachers feeling freer to express their views (Qvortrup, 2017).

The research is original because it gathered the views of those involved in home-schooling within a municipality: school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents. Other research which has so far been carried out in Norway has had a broader focus, although arguably more superficial. A survey conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Education (Federici & Vika, 2020) targeted selected groups of teachers and school leaders from 200 schools across Norway. Research by Gudmundsdottir and Hathaway (2020) was of 574 teachers. Slettemeås and Storm-Mathisen (2020) surveyed a randomly selected cross-section of society about digital homelife during the pandemic. Roe et al. (2020) surveyed 4,500 parents.

Our research sought the views of pupils of all ages, from 6 to 16. Few other surveys in Norway included pupils at all. Nordahl (2020) surveyed students aged 10 to 16 in one county but only after they had returned to school (11–20 May). Von Soest et al. (2020) surveyed 12 to 16 year olds in the Oslo area during the home-school period, but this was about their quality of life, not their education. To our knowledge, there has not been other research in Norway which has included the youngest children, nor any which has involved all the different stakeholders at the same time during the home-school period.

In Norway's national student survey (UDIR, 2020) the category of *student democracy and participation* is among those receiving the lowest score in the municipality. It was therefore of particular interest to be able to study the views of pupils to a rapidly changed situation. Their many ideas for improving schools included video meetings, weekly schedules and opportunities for pupils unable to attend school to receive digital lessons. Pupils at every age reported that the best thing about home-school was being at home and organising their own day. However, 11% of those in Grades 5 to 10 said they were pleased to be away from teachers and 7% away from fellow pupils (the figures for the younger respondents was 4% and 2%, respectively). Although this is a minority, it is still of concern.

There are limitations to our research, however. It was conducted in a municipality that has just eight schools; although this may seem small, it is approximately the 100th largest in population out of the 356 municipalities in Norway. The research was based on surveys: interviews and focus groups would have enhanced our findings, but this would have been hard to justify at a time of stress with the spread of the virus across the world. As with any survey, one does not know how seriously respondents completed it or how they interpreted the statements. However, the quantity and quality of the comments suggest that the survey was clearly understood; people responded in earnest and sometimes with passion.

## Conclusion

This study makes a distinct contribution to learning. It records the experiences of a unique period, from the separate perspectives of pupils, parents, teachers and school leaders in one municipality. Even though the municipality was well-equipped with digital communications infrastructure, it was still a shock for an entire schooling experience to be taken out of the existing physical infrastructure and delivered remotely using internet technology to a degree that was unprecedented for an entire school-age cohort across the whole of a municipality.

It shows how much can be gained from asking the views of pupils and parents, as well as teachers. There was much similarity in the views of the different groups. The differences were most pronounced where pupils considered that they had learned more and done more work at home than at school than the teachers thought. Both pupils and parents/carers were positive about teachers' efforts, both in setting creative tasks and in maintaining contact with pupils. As Moss et al. (2020) found, the COVID-19 crisis has underlined the vital role schools play in caring for children, as well as helping them learn.

There is also much to be taken further. How schools can build on improved digital skills, how learning activities can be organised, and how homework can be changed are all relevant considerations. Many pupils reported positive experiences with flexible school days when they organised their own daily routines, worked at their own pace and experienced independence. It will be interesting to explore how schools develop this in the future.

The pandemic has given an opportunity to rethink education and focus on the 'what, how, and where of learning' (Zhao, 2020), including the relationship between teachers and parents (Wrigley, 2020). It is a time for countries to learn from and help each other; to see what was achieved during remote schooling and listen to pupils and parents/carers to improve schools. The municipality studied in this paper is in a strong position to do this, not least because they have the evidence from research in a report (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Not all countries or localities may be able to emulate them, but those which do have the necessary resources should consider seriously and urgently how they might do so. Remote learning is an important part of our armoury against a pandemic or similar threats, but it requires preparation. Whether such preparation is a cost-effective investment at a time of economic challenges is a political decision, but concerns about feasibility of public acceptance by teachers, pupils and parents/carers should not be used as an excuse for failing to do so. The experience that we have recorded tells us that the changes required in a crisis can be made quickly and accelerate sustained school improvement.

The World Bank has emphasised the need for 'building back better' strategies, which include developing 'more equitable and resilient post-COVID education systems that enable children to learn continuously both in schools and at home' (Azevedo et al., 2020). The research explored in this paper has made a contribution to that endeavour.

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

# The relations of parental supervision, parental school involvement, and child's social competence with school achievement in primary school

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**Funding information**

UNICEF Office for Croatia, Grant/Award Number: This research was funded by the United Nations Chi

**Abstract**

The aim of this study was to examine the relation of parental supervision, parental involvement at school and child's social competence with school achievement in primary school. A theoretical model was postulated that predicts direct and indirect effects of parental behaviors on adolescents' school achievement. Participants were 1,024 adolescents attending Grades 5 through 8 in 20 primary schools in Croatia and one of their parents or guardians. Adolescents completed a scale assessing their self-perceived social competence and data on their grade point average were collected. Parents completed scales measuring parental supervision and parental involvement at school and they rated their child's social competence. The results of model testing showed that parental behaviors have both direct and indirect effect on adolescents' school achievement. Greater parental supervision and school involvement have a direct and an indirect, through their effects on child's social competence, positive effects on adolescents' school achievement.

**KEYWORDS**

parental school involvement, parental supervision, school achievement, social competence



## 1 | INTRODUCTION

During early adolescence, children's school motivation, engagement, and achievement often start to steadily decline, whereas at the same time the long-term effects of school successes start to increase (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Mombourquette, 2007). School achievement is affected by various environmental factors, among which parental behaviors are one of the most influential. Although the significant effects of parental school involvement in promoting their children's school achievement have been widely recognized and evidenced in empirical studies (e.g., Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016; Castro et al., 2015; X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Higgins & Katsipatakis, 2015; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hong, Yoo, You, & Wu, 2010; M. C. Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997), the processes or pathways of these effects are less well understood and explored (e.g., Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Craft, 2003; Seginer, 2006). The benefits of examining such processes are reflected in the fact that specific recommendations can be formulated and provided on how precisely parental behaviors contribute to their children's school achievement, and which parental behaviors should be targeted in interventions as to improve children's successes in school (e.g., Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). The contemporary studies of parental school involvement are focused on examining the mediators, moderators, and antecedents of the parental behavior–school achievement link (e.g., Hill & Tyson, 2009; Seginer, 2006). Hence, in this study, we will explore to what extent and how certain parental behaviors pertaining to their adolescents' schooling are related to adolescents' success in school.

Several theoretical models describing to what extent and how family characteristics, parent–child interactions and individual characteristics of parents and children might be implicated in children's school successes exist in the literature (e.g., Adams & Ryan, 2005; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Marjoribanks, 1996; Ryan & Adams, 1995; Scott-Jones, 1995). Each of these theoretical models provides useful descriptions of the mechanisms through which family processes can contribute to children's successes in school. In the models, family characteristics and processes, parenting styles, parental characteristics, and parent–child interactions are usually postulated as a context that facilitates or impedes parental actions regarding their children's successes in school. These models further postulate that the effects of parental behaviors on children's successes in school are usually indirect, operating through the individual characteristics of the child as these characteristics are more proximal to child's school successes. Moreover, not all children will respond the same way to certain interactions and processes in the family or to parental characteristics and behaviors (Rogers, Theule, Ryan, Adams, & Keating, 2009). Among different parental behaviors, parental involvement and monitoring showed to be strong determinants of adolescent school achievement (Spera, 2005). Thus, in this study, we will focus on these two parental behaviors, more precisely on the pathways of their impact on adolescents' school achievement.

Parental school involvement encompasses a wide range of parental practices regarding education and schooling that parents employ with the purpose of promoting their children's school success (e.g., Fishel & Ramirez, 2005; Seginer, 2006). Researchers generally agree that parental school involvement is a multidimensional construct and research efforts have been focused on identifying and exploring its different dimensions and aspects (e.g., Desimone, 1999; Epstein, 1995; X. Fan, 2001; X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wilder, 2014). In general, dimensions or aspects of parental school involvement can be grouped into three types: home-base involvement (e.g., parental engagement with school work, communication between parents and children about school, creating a learning environment at home), school-based involvement (e.g., communication between parents and teachers, visits to school for school events, volunteering at school), and academic socialization (e.g., parental aspirations and expectation for child's education, parental value or utility of education, fostering educational and occupational aspirations) (Hill & Tyson, 2009). According to X. Fan and Chen (2001), the relationship between parental school involvement and school achievement can be generalized across different types of school achievement indicators (e.g., test scores and school GPA), gender and ethnicity of children. But, the effects and the mechanisms of influence of parental school involvement vary by the type of parental involvement (e.g., home-based vs. school-based), areas of academic achievement (e.g., mathematics vs. reading) and age of



children (e.g., elementary school vs. high school) (X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Craft, 2003; Singh, Bickley, & Trivette, 1995).

The results of meta-analyses about parental school involvement (X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009) showed that academic socialization is the strongest correlate of children's school achievement, followed by school-based and home-based involvement. The results of previous research clearly indicate that academic socialization has a positive effect on school successes among children of different age, but the results about the effects of school-based and home-based involvement are somewhat mixed, especially for adolescents (e.g., Adams & Ryan, 2005; X. Fan, 2001; Kaplan Toren, 2013; Shute, Hansen, Underwood, & Razzouk, 2011; Singh et al., 1995; M. C. Wang et al., 1997). Although numerous studies imply the positive impact of school- and home-based involvement on children's school successes (e.g., X. Fan, 2001; W. Fan & Williams, 2010; Fernández-Alonso, Álvarez-Díaz, Woitschach, Suárez-Álvarez, & Cuesta, 2017; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Kaplan Toren, 2013; Mombourquette, 2007; Singh et al., 1995; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014), certain studies indicate that there is no association between these types of parental involvement and children's success in school, or that the association is marginal or even negative (e.g., X. Fan, 2001; W. Fan & Williams, 2010; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Kaplan Toren, 2013; Mombourquette, 2007; Singh et al., 1995). The mixed findings in the literature might be due to a lack of a clear operational definition of parental involvement (X. Fan & Chen, 2001), different school outcomes under investigation (W. Fan & Williams, 2010), or the changing nature of parent-child relationship, especially during the transitional phase of adolescence (Singh et al., 1995). Thus, more empirical studies about how and to what extent each type of parental involvement is related to children's school achievement is warranted (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Seginer, 2006).

Parent-child relationship undergoes different changes during adolescence, and due to adolescents' growing need for autonomy and independence, it is not yet clear how parental behaviors and school involvement affect adolescents' school achievement, because findings cannot be generalized across children of different age (X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Craft, 2003; Singh et al., 1995). Adolescents are entering a developmental phase in which many of them make critical decisions concerning their self-worth and competencies, worthiness and competencies of others, and the value of education and work (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parental behaviors and involvement regarding schooling and education have a critical role in this process, because parents are still one of the most influential environmental factors in their children's education, life, and development. When parents are involved in their children's schooling, school activities and programs: (a) they are communicating and showing to their children strategies and skills for effectively dealing with school and school assignments, as well as the value and importance of education and school (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Tyson, 2009); (b) they can set limits and rules regarding school obligations and activities and provide continuous encouragement and support as children encounter different school, social and personal challenges (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Scott-Jones, 1995); (c) they are communicating to children and to others that their children are important to them and that they are interested in their children's successes and failures (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994); and (d) they are providing a support system at home for their children's academic learning (Ames, deStefano, Watkins, & Sheldon, 1995). Consequently, children can become very motivated, self-confident, and engaged, as well as advance when they see that their parents value education, schooling, and school-related activities and that they are actively involved (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005).

Besides parental involvement in schooling, other parental behaviors also affect their children's school achievement. Studies show that authoritative parenting, which is characterized by high parental acceptance of their child, high supervision, and high psychological autonomy granting is related with better school achievement in adolescents (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Nyarko, 2011; Park & Bauer, 2002). The relation of other parental characteristics, such as family structure and parental education, with school achievement may also be mediated through parenting practices such as parental warmth, supervision, and affective support (Deslandes, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999). However, findings regarding the

relationship between parental monitoring as one dimension of authoritative parenting style and children's school achievement have been mixed. Some studies show that the smaller amount of unsupervised time after school explains better mathematics achievement of children whose mothers are not employed than children whose mothers are full-time employed (Muller, 1995), indicating that parental supervision positively contributes to school achievement. Other studies indicate that higher parental monitoring is negatively related with children's school achievement, probably due to high parental control and pressure undermining children's intrinsic motivation, sense of value and responsibility, thus adversely affecting performance in school (Areepattamannil, 2010). Hence, it is important to explore to what extent and how parental supervision may contribute to adolescents' school achievement.

Even though parental school involvement affects their children's school achievement directly, much of this impact is also happening indirectly, through child's individual characteristics (e.g., Adams & Ryan, 2005; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Kaplan Toren, 2013; Núñez et al., 2015; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). It has long been recognized that certain child's individual characteristics and attributes are powerful determinants of school achievement, among which is child's social competence (e.g., Green, Forehand, Beck, & Vosk, 1980; Simons-Morton & Davis Crump, 2003; Wentzel, 1991). Social competence is also related with parental behaviors and practices (e.g., Engels, Dekovic, & Meeus, 2002; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010; Simons-Morton & Davis Crump, 2003), as well as with parental school involvement, with increases in parental school involvement predicting improvement in social skills in adolescence (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). Therefore, it is reasonable to anticipate that adolescents' social competence, or more precisely their prosocial and emotional regulation skills, may mediate the relationship between parental behaviors and adolescents' school achievement.

Whereas some parental behaviors may decline in amount, intensity, or effectiveness during adolescent years, other parental behaviors may increase in importance, especially for adolescents' academic outcomes. So, it is important to identify which parental behaviors regarding their children's schooling have a positive effect on adolescents' success in school and through which pathways they realize such an effect. For the purpose of this study, a theoretical model of relations between parental supervision, parental involvement at school, adolescents' social competence, and school achievement has been postulated (Figure 1). It is assumed that parental supervision and parental involvement at school have both direct and indirect effects, via adolescents' social competence, on adolescent's school achievement. More precisely, it is expected that higher parental supervision and school involvement have positive direct as well as indirect, through higher adolescents' social competence, effects on adolescents' school achievement.

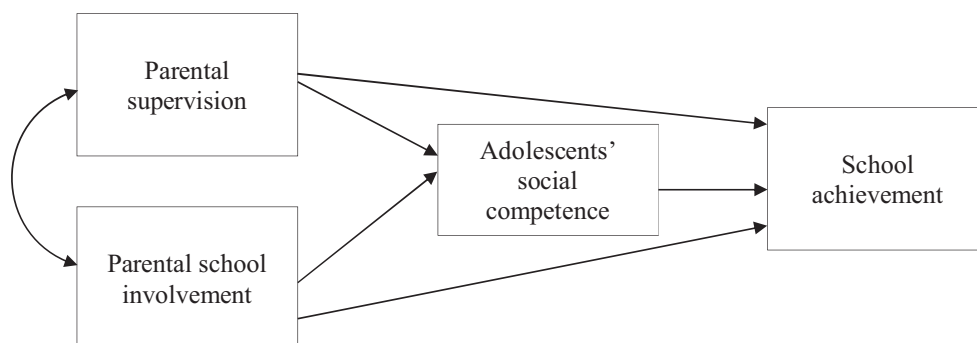


**FIGURE 1** Theoretical model of relations between parental supervision, parental school involvement, adolescents' social competence, and school achievement

## 2 | METHOD

### 2.1 | Participants

Participants in the study were 1,024 adolescents (56.6% girls) and one of their parents or guardians (82.5% mothers, 16.8% fathers, and 0.7% guardians). Adolescents attended Grades 5 through 8 in 20 primary schools in Croatia and were aged from 10 to 16 years ( $M = 13.35$ , standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = 1.22). Most adolescents were from two-parent families (88.1%). The majority of adolescents' parents were employed (71.8% of mothers and 80.1% of fathers). As for parents' educational level, the majority of adolescents' parents had completed high school (57% of mothers and 61.8% of fathers), smaller number of parents attained some form of graduate or post-graduate degree (32.2% of mothers and 30.5% of fathers), while the smallest portion of parents in the sample had uncompleted or completed primary school (10.9% of mothers and 7.7% of fathers).

### 2.2 | Measures

#### 2.2.1 | Parental supervision

The subscale Parental Supervision from the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire—Short Form (APQ—Short Form; Elgar, Waschbusch, Dadds, & Sigvaldason, 2007) was used to assess parental supervision. The subscale consists of three items measuring parental monitoring of child's whereabouts, activities, and friends (e.g., *Your child is out with friends you don't know*). Parents rated how often the described events typically occurred in their home on a scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*. In this study, principal component analysis of the scale yielded one factor that accounted for 53% of the variance, and internal consistency of the scale was moderate ( $\alpha = .53$ ). Compared with other subscales of the APQ—Short Form, this subscale showed lower internal consistency in other studies that used parental self-report data as well (e.g., Hershkowitz, Dekel, Fridkin, & Freedman, 2017; Mason et al., 2016), and this is due to shorter length of the scale (Elgar et al., 2007). Higher scores indicate poorer parental supervision.

#### 2.2.2 | Parental involvement at school

The Parental Involvement at School scale from the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) was adapted in the research project by a panel of experts in the field of developmental and educational psychology to encompass the customary parental activities and behaviors in the school setting in Croatia and used to assess parental engagement at their child's school. Parents were asked to rate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always* how often they are involved in their child's school in five different ways (i.e., talk to their child's teacher, volunteer in their child's classroom or school, attend parental meetings, attend individual consultations with their child's teacher, and attend different school events; e.g., concerts and sport events). In this study, principal component analysis of the scale yielded a single factor that accounted for 43.5% of the variance. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the scale was .66. Higher scores indicate greater parental school involvement.

#### 2.2.3 | Social competence

The Social Competence Scale—Parent Version (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group [CPPRG], 1995; Corrigan, 2002) was used to measure child's prosocial behaviors, communication skills, and self-control. This 12-item scale contains two subscales—Prosocial/Communication Skills (six items, e.g., *Helpful to others*) and Emotional Regulation Skills (six items, e.g., *Can calm down when excited*), which can be combined into a total score. In this study, the scale was adapted for use with adolescents as well. Parents assessed how well each statement described their child and adolescents assessed how well each statement described them on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at*

all to 5 = *very well*. Principal component analysis of parents' reports yielded a two-factor solution: Prosocial/Communication Skills (43.3% of the variance) and Emotional Regulation Skills (51.8%). Principal component analysis of adolescents' reports also yielded a two-factor solution: Prosocial/Communication Skills (46.3% of the variance) and Emotional Regulation Skills (56.1% of the variance). Internal consistency of the Prosocial/Communication Skills subscale for parental reports was .81 and for adolescents' reports .85. Internal consistency of the Emotional Regulation Skills subscale for parental reports was .79 and for adolescents' reports .82. Internal consistency of the whole scale based on parental reports was .88 and on adolescents' reports .89. In this study, a total score of 12 items was used as an indicator of adolescents' social competence, with higher scores denoting higher social competence.

## 2.2.4 | School achievement

Adolescents' reports on their grade point average (GPA; from 1 = *insufficient* to 5 = *excellent*) at the end of the previous grade were used as an indicator of school achievement.

## 2.3 | Procedure

The data used in the study were collected as a part of a larger research project examining peer violence in schools. The study was conducted in 20 primary schools located in 15 different cities from Northwest, Central, and Eastern and Adriatic region of Croatia. The research was conducted in compliance with the principles and guidelines for research involving children. The participation in the project was voluntary and no reward was given for participation. Parental and adolescent informed consent was obtained for adolescents' participation in the study and informed consent was obtained from parents for their own participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured for all the participants. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires to adolescents during regular school classes in their schools. Parents completed the questionnaires in their homes and returned them to school in sealed envelopes. All the measurement instruments used in the study were reviewed by a panel of experts in the field of developmental and educational psychology before their use to ensure their applicability to the Croatian context.

## 3 | RESULTS

Means, *SDs*, and correlations for all the variables in the study are presented in Table 1. On average, adolescents rated their social competence as high and they had very good school achievement. Parents reported a moderate level of involvement in their children's schooling, high level of supervision, and rated their children's social competence as high.

**TABLE 1** Means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and correlations between study variables

|                                       | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4      |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| 1. Social competence—parental ratings | 3.94     | 0.64      | 1       |         |         |        |
| 2. Social competence—child ratings    | 3.86     | 0.71      | 0.32**  | 1       |         |        |
| 3. Parental supervision               | 1.43     | 0.55      | −0.23** | −0.14** | 1       |        |
| 4. Parental school involvement        | 3.49     | 0.61      | 0.27**  | 0.11**  | −0.14** | 1      |
| 5. School achievement                 | 4.23     | 0.66      | 0.18**  | 0.21**  | −0.11** | 0.19** |

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

The correlations in Table 1 show that adolescents' social competence, as rated by the adolescents themselves and by their parents, is positively associated with school achievement, as well as with parental school involvement. Poor parental supervision was related to lower adolescents' social competence, parental school involvement, and school achievement. Greater parental school involvement is related to better school achievement.

A theoretical model that predicts direct and indirect, through adolescents' social competence, effects of parental behaviors on adolescents' school achievement was tested (Figure 1). Path analysis was used to test the model in which parental supervision and parental school involvement directly and/or indirectly, via adolescents' social competence, affects adolescents' school achievement. Two models were tested—one with parental ratings of adolescents' social competence and the other with adolescents' self-rated social competence as a mediator variable. First, direct effects in both models were estimated and afterwards indirect links were added to the models and indirect effects were tested. When certain path between two variables was shown to be insignificant, it was omitted from the model until the best-fitting model was derived. We selected the nonsignificant  $\chi^2$ , the comparative fit index (CFI)  $\geq 0.90$ , the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $\leq 0.06$ , and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)  $\leq 0.08$  values for indices of good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). All the models were estimated using Mplus version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012-2012).

Final models with standardized path coefficients from models with both direct and indirect links between the variables are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The results of testing the model with adolescents' self-rated social competence as a mediator show that the model fitted the data very well;  $\chi^2(2) = 0.00$  (*ns*), CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, SRMR = 0.00 (Figure 2). The model with parental ratings of social competence as a mediator variable also fitted the data very well;  $\chi^2(1) = 3.103$  (*ns*), CFI = 0.986, TLI = 0.932, SRMR = 0.016 (Figure 3).

In the model with self-ratings of social competence (Figure 2), but not the one with parental ratings (Figure 3), poor parental supervision had a small negative direct effect on school achievement. In both models, the direct effect of parental school involvement on school achievement was significant. Two indirect effects were tested: from poor parental supervision to school achievement via adolescents' social competence (self-ratings or parental ratings) and from parental school involvement to school achievement via adolescents' social competence (self-ratings or parental ratings; Table 2). The results presented in Table 2 show that all four indirect effects were significant as a bootstrapped 95% confidence interval, obtained using resampling method (1,000 bootstrapped samples), around the indirect effect did not contain zero (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Although the sample is large, low reliabilities and distribution of answers on variables warranted the use of bootstrapping.

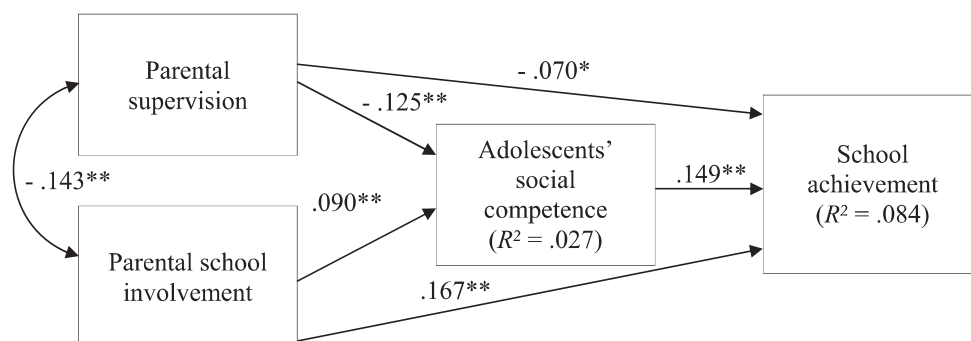


**FIGURE 2** Results of path analyses testing the direct and indirect, through adolescents' self-rated social competence, effects of parental supervision and parental school involvement on adolescents' school achievement  
\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$  indicate standardized estimates

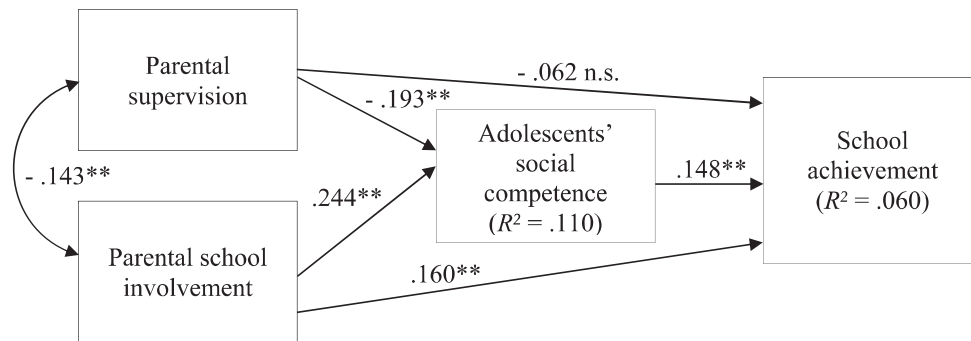


**FIGURE 3** Results of path analyses testing the direct and indirect, through parents' ratings of adolescents' social competence, effects of parental supervision, and parental school involvement on adolescents' school achievement \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Standardized estimates. n.s. – not significant

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the association between certain parental behaviors and adolescents' school achievement. Specifically, the aim was to empirically examine the direct and indirect, via adolescents' social competence, effects of parental supervision, and parental school involvement on adolescents' school achievement. The results of the study showed that the examined parental behaviors have both direct and indirect effects on adolescents' school achievement. It should also be noted that the significant indirect effects are found in both tested models, namely in that with parental as well as in that with adolescents' own ratings of social competence, which adds strengths to the findings of this study. Before discussing these findings in detail, it should be pointed out that, based on the results of adolescents' and parents' self-ratings on the examined variables, they mainly apply to well-functioning (i.e., highly socially and academically competent) adolescents in Croatia whose parents are involved in their schooling and supervise them.

The results show that adolescents whose parents are more involved at their child's school, through more frequent communication with their child's teacher and other parents, volunteering in school and attending school events, have better school achievement. The results on the positive direct effect of parental school involvement on adolescents' school achievement is in line with previous studies which showed a small, but significant and positive direct effect of parental school- and home-based involvement on school achievement of adolescents (Carranza, You, Chhuon, & Hudley, 2009; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Several theoretical explanations as to why parental involvement would directly affect school achievement are described in the literature. First, Epstein (1988) suggested that parents who are actively involved in school activities, meet with teachers, and go to school events and meetings make it more likely that the school and teachers will take an interest in their children's successes and development. Second, it could be that parents tend to become actively involved in school activities as a result of their children's good school achievement (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994),

**TABLE 2** Values of and confidence intervals (CI) for the indirect effects

| Path of indirect effect                                                                     | $\beta$ | $p$  | CI               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|------------------|
| Parental supervision—Child's social competence (self-ratings)—School achievement            | -.024   | .004 | -0.038 to -0.011 |
| Parental school involvement—Child's social competence (self-ratings)—School achievement     | .017    | .021 | 0.005 to 0.030   |
| Parental supervision—Child's social competence (parental ratings)—School achievement        | -0.029  | .002 | -0.043 to -0.014 |
| Parental school involvement—Child's social competence (parental ratings)—School achievement | .036    | .000 | 0.019 to 0.053   |



and such an explanation suggests a bidirectional relation between parental involvement and their children's school achievement. Related to that proposition, several longitudinal studies with adolescents (e.g., X. Fan, 2001; Hong & Ho, 2005; Hong et al., 2010) indicate that adolescents' previous school achievement has a stronger effect on parental behaviors and expectations, as opposed to parental behaviors and expectations as an influence on adolescents' school achievement. Hence, further studies examining the direction of these effects are warranted. It is important to note that the results of this study support the conclusion that parental school-based involvement remains important for school achievement of adolescents, at least well-functioning adolescents, especially considering the decline in this type of parental school involvement observed in the studies (e.g., Spera, 2005).

Furthermore, the findings of this study point to weak direct effect of parental supervision on adolescents' school achievement in the examined group of parent-child dyads, observed only in the model with adolescents' self-ratings of social competence. Thus, adolescents whose parents more frequently supervise their whereabouts, activities, and friends have better school achievement. Previous studies (e.g., Jacobson & Crockett, 2000; Kristjánsson & Sigfúsdóttir, 2009) showed similar results about the importance and extent of direct and indirect effect of parental monitoring. Parental monitoring includes rules regarding children's activities both in and outside of school, and good parental monitoring should contribute to the development of self-management skills related to school achievement (Scott-Jones, 1995), as well as to children's understanding of acceptable behaviors and expectations which contribute to better school adjustment (Adams & Ryan, 2005).

The results of this study further show that parental behaviors, specifically their school involvement and supervision, also affect adolescents' school achievement indirectly, via their effects on adolescents' social competence. Adolescents whose parents are more involved at their school and supervise them more have better prosocial, communication, and emotional regulation skills and better school achievement. Previous studies also showed that different individual characteristics of the child mediate the relation between parental involvement and child's school achievement. For example, Hill and Craft (2003) found that child's social competence mediates the relation between parental home-based involvement and math performance for Euro-American children. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) showed that parental school-based involvement, both mothers' and fathers', is related to adolescents' school achievement through its relation to scholastic competence. Chen and Ho (2012) found that students' academic beliefs mediated the relation between parental involvement and academic achievement for late adolescents. Rogers et al. (2009) indicated that parental involvement influences school achievement through the mediational role of the child's academic competence and self-concept. M.-T. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) showed that parental involvement predicted adolescents' academic success and mental health indirectly, through its effect on adolescent behavioral and emotional engagement. All these studies, along with the findings of this study, are consistent with the assumptions of theoretical models of the family-school relationship described in the literature (Adams & Ryan, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Marjoribanks, 1996; Ryan & Adams, 1995; Scott-Jones, 1995). Several possible explanations on why child's social competence mediates the parental involvement-school achievement link can be provided. First, when they are actively involved in their child's schooling and communicate with teachers and school, parents may gather information about their child's behavior and difficulties, and later deal with these at home, while reinforcing positive behaviors (El Nokali et al., 2010). Second, parental involvement in education activities at home and in school improves prosocial behavior and children's ability to control their emotions, which in turn enables them to use the academic skills they have to perform better in school (Hill & Craft, 2003). Thirdly, parents' involvement in different school activities makes such activities closer to the child and the child can see that they are more conquerable (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Thus, the child who has such knowledge may feel more competent about mastering and controlling school outcomes. Also, bearing in mind and respecting adolescents' growing need for independence, parental involvement in different activities in their child's school may provide a feeling of care, closeness, and support, which can contribute to positive representation of self in adolescents (M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

This study provides valuable findings regarding the relation between parental school involvement, parental supervision, and adolescents' social competence and school achievement, but several limitations of the study should be

noted. First, the study is conducted with adolescents attending primary schools in Croatia and their parents. On average, adolescents in this sample rated themselves as highly socially competent and had very good school achievement, and their parents self-reported on average a moderate level of involvement in their adolescents' schooling and high level of parental supervision. This limits the generalizability of the findings on a specific subsample of well-functioning adolescents and parents and indicates the need for examination of the obtained effects in differently functioning samples of adolescents and parents. Also, the forms and levels of parental school involvement and its relation with adolescents' school achievement may differ in different counties and educational systems, as well as in different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Second, although the sample in this study included parents of different employment status and education level, the majority of parents were employed and had at least a high school degree, and parental school involvement and aspirations for their children's educational attainment may vary with respect to these parental characteristics (e.g., Shumow & Miller, 2001; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). This highlights the need for future studies focusing on parents and families of different socioeconomic background. Third, the study used a cross-sectional design, so no conclusions about the causal ordering of parental behaviors, development of children's characteristics, and academic outcomes can be made. It is possible that higher school grades and social competence of adolescents serve as a motivation for their parents to become even more involved in their children's lives. Fourth, other methods of data collection should be employed in future research to strengthen the findings. Although self-report data have its strengths, the constructs (e.g., social competence and school grades) could be examined using different sources and methods of data collection (e.g., observation of adolescents' social competencies and school records of adolescents' grades) to add to the objectivity of the results. Finally, the scales used in the assessment of parental supervision and parental school involvement showed low internal consistencies, probably due to small number of items and the homogeneity in the responses to the items by adolescents and parents in the sample with respect to the measurement characteristic (e.g., King Pike & Hudson, 1998). The issue of reliability also restricts the strength and generalization of the obtained patterns of relations and calls for future examination of the properties of the used measures across similar and different samples. Future studies should examine these relations in different socioeconomic groups, separately assessing mother's and father's behaviors, and examining differences in parental behaviors and their effects between girls and boys.

Overall, the findings of this study support the proposition that parents' behavior remains an important determinant of adolescent development (Collins & Laursen, 2004) and that parents should use developmentally appropriate behaviors and strategies which are positively related to school outcomes for adolescents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The findings of this study have several practical implications for improving adolescents' school achievement, at least among socially and academically well-functioning adolescents. Teachers and schools should take efforts to stimulate parents to become and remain engaged in their children's schooling during adolescent years. They should communicate with parents about their children's school successes, but also about their behavior and adjustment in the classroom and in the school. This can be achieved through parental meetings and individual consultations with parents, but lectures and workshops on how to improve adolescents' social competence should also be organized and offered to parents. Parents should be invited to school events and encouraged to participate in school life in different ways adapted to their personal possibilities. Finally, parents' awareness regarding the importance of monitoring of adolescents' life and activities outside of school should be raised. Generally, although their adolescent children are showing a growing need for autonomy and independence, parents should be encouraged to remain actively involved in their children's life in school and outside of school to positively contribute to their school achievement.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was funded by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Office for Croatia, under the project External evaluation of the "For safe and enabling school environment" project in Croatia. The findings and conclusions in this study are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funder.